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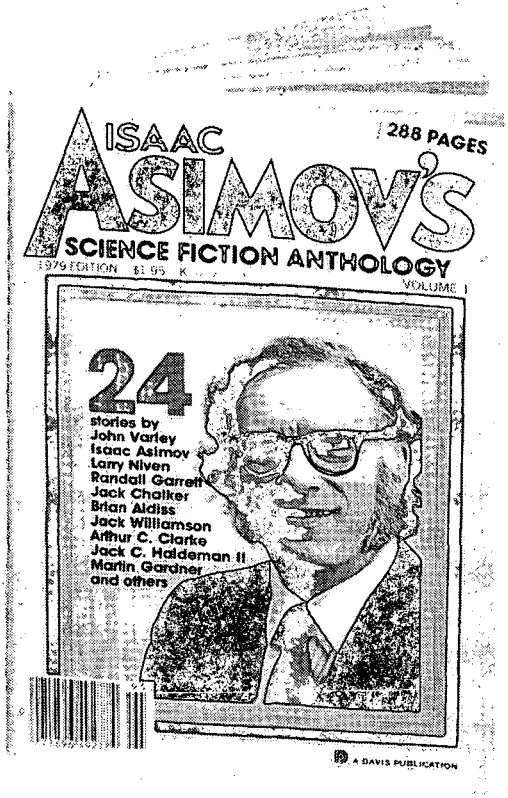

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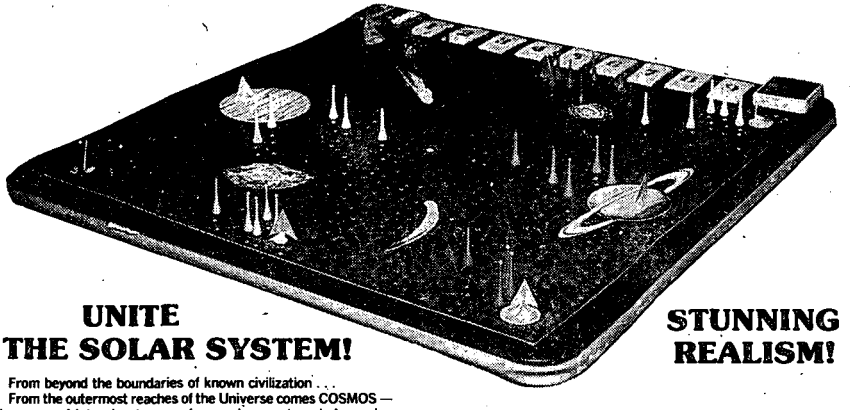

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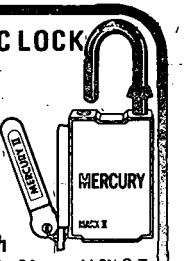

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EDITORIAL: THE ARTICLES OF SF

by Isaac Asimov

art: Frank Kelly Freas

The word "magazine" comes, oddly enough, from the Arabic; and its original meaning was that of a storehouse containing a miscellaneous supply of things needed for trading purposes.

What we *now* most frequently call magazines are periodicals that contain a supply of miscellaneous reading material. Or, at least, some do. There has always been a tendency for specializing in order to more nearly meet the needs of a particular sub-audience. One specialization has been in the direction of an exclusively-fiction periodical.

Indeed, in the heyday of the pulp magazines of the 1920s and 1930s, the content was not merely fiction, but a precise variety of fiction; and the first science fiction magazines were in that tradition.

The early science fiction magazines might contain a short message from the editor, a letter column, an occasional book review, and perhaps a "science quiz" (and advertisements, of course). But with those minor and non-significant exceptions, fiction—and science fiction at that—filled every page.

I'm not sure when and how the notion of having a non-fiction article in the SF magazines first arose. However, the first non-fiction articles of which I was personally aware and which ground themselves into my memory came in 1934.

Charles Fort had written a book called *Lo!*, and *Astounding Stories* ran it in eight installments beginning with the April 1934 issue.

Why?—Because the book had a science fictional aura.

Charles Fort was the Immanuel Velikovsky of his time. He believed in all sorts of unorthodox notions that were frowned on by conventional scientists. Whereas Velikovsky supports his notions by quoting myths and legends that he carefully selects for the purpose, Fort supported his notions, in even less reliable fashion, by collecting newspaper articles reporting bizarre events.

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Though *Lo!* drove me mad with its silliness, it proved extraordinarily popular with the readers; and the editor of *Astounding,* F. Orlin Tremaine, searched for other non-fiction that readers of science fiction would welcome.

Beginning with the June, 1936, issue of *Astounding Stories,* for instance, Tremaine ran John W. Campbell's "A Study of the Solar System," which ran for eighteen consecutive issues, and which was eaten up alive by the readers. I myself found it wonderful.

Since most science fiction stories in those days were adventure tales placed on various worlds of the Solar system, it was delightful (and, for the writers, useful) to read the then-latest knowledge of those worlds written in Campbell's dramatic style.

It was not long after the conclusion of Campbell's series that he became editor of the magazine, replacing Tremaine. Campbell naturally believed that the non-fiction article owned a place in science fiction magazines, and he cultivated new and better non-fiction as assiduously as he cultivated new and better fiction.

There was, for instance, Willy Ley. Ley was German-born but had left Germany as soon as Hitler came to power (out of conviction and not out of fear, for he was not Jewish). He was interested in the full breadth of science, but his specialty was rocketry. An article of his, "The Dawn of the Conquest of Space," appeared in the March, 1937, *Astounding,* while it was still under Tremaine.

Campbell published many of Ley's articles; and Ley, in his turn, published many articles in the other science fiction magazines. In fact, it is quite fair to say that Willy Ley was the father of the non-fiction article as it exists today in science fiction magazines. He dealt with subjects on the frontiers of science, subjects that shaded off into science fiction, but did so always with firm rationalism and with thorough scientific knowledge.

Other writers followed his lead. L. Sprague de Camp (my personal favorite in the field) wrote several top-notch articles for *Astounding,* including "Language for Time Travelers" in the July, 1938, issue; "Design for Life" in the May and June, 1939, issues; and "The Sea-King's Armored Division" in the September and October, 1941, issues. Robert S. Richardson, the astronomer, wrote several dozen astronomical articles for *Astounding* through the 1940s.

Willy Ley had an article in the first issue (October, 1950) of *Galaxy Science Fiction* and, eventually, became its monthly science columnist, a post he held till his death in 1969. It was a very popular feature in the magazine and was always the item I

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Stone, Josephine Rector	PRAISE ALL THE MOONS OF MORNING	Atheneum Publishers (An Argo Book)	7.95	3/9
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Bensen, Donald R.	AND HAVING WRIT . . .	Ace Science Fiction	1.95	3/1
Bova, Ben (editor)	THE BEST OF ANALOG	Ace Science Fiction	2.25	3/1
Davidson, Avram	THE KAR-CHEE REIGN / ROGUE DRAGON	Ace Science Fiction	1.95	3/1
Lord, Jeffrey	BLADE #31	Pinnacle Books, Inc.	1.50	3/20

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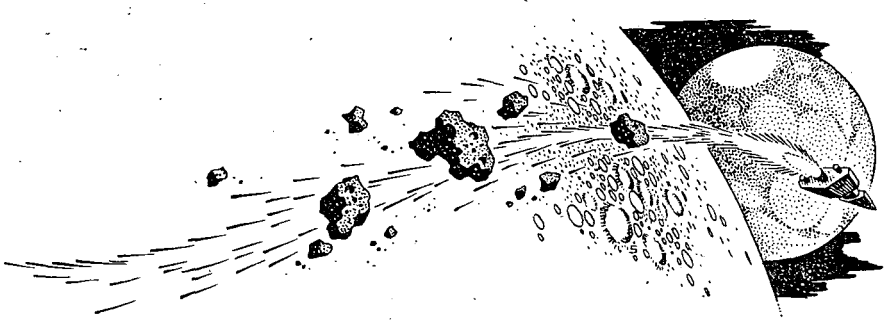

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turned to first.

I myself felt the lure of the science article. The first ones I wrote were for Campbell, of course; and my very first was "Hemoglobin and the Universe," which appeared in the February, 1955, issue of *Astounding* (unless you want to count my gag-piece "The Endochronic Properties of Resublimated Thiotimoline," which appeared in the March, 1948 issue).

It was in response to these articles, and to the success of Ley's column, that Robert P. Mills, editor of *Venture Science Fiction,* asked me to do a similar science column for that magazine. I accepted; my article "Fecundity Limited!" appeared in the January, 1958, issue of that magazine.

Alas, I only had time to publish four articles before the magazine folded; but by then, Mills was convinced that I was the only person who could match Ley in erudition. I *didn't* feel that, but you can bet I had no intention of disillusioning him.

Consequently, he asked me to shift my column to *Venture*'s sister-publication, *The Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction.* This I did; and my first article there, "The Dust of Ages," appeared in the November, 1958, issue. It continues to this day without missing an issue.

Several questions now arise:

First, since *Isaac Asimov's Science Fiction Magazine* is now a monthly, since it has a higher circulation than *F & SF,* and since its pay-rate is higher, am I going to switch my column from the latter to the former?

The answer is "No." There's such a thing as loyalty and both George and Joel understand thoroughly that I have old-fashioned ideas about such things.

Well then, are we going to have someone else as a monthly science columnist?

Probably not.

The trouble is that there are some difficult criteria to meet before we can have one. The monthly science columnist has to be a polymath, acquainted with a wide breadth of subjects, or he or she will not be able to have sufficient variety in the subject matter.

He or she must have an endless fund of ideas, for it isn't enough merely to repeat the material out of the sources: one should be able to add some original thoughts, conjectures, or inferences.

He or she must be able to write both authoritatively and entertainingly, and the combination isn't very easy to find.

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Finally, and *most important of all,* he or she must be compulsive enough to meet a monthly deadline.

Well, then, are we going to have science articles?

Of course! We've had them in the past, and we'll have them in the future. Thanks to Campbell and Ley, science fiction readers have been educated into the virtue of science articles.

We may not have one every issue, however. We would rather not be forced to run a dull or trivial article just because that happens to be the only thing we have on hand and because we feel bound to have one in every issue.

And to some extent, you readers have your responsibility, too. Thousands of you must have special knowledge of some science-related subject that our eclectically minded readers would love to hear about.

Query George on the subject matter, if you wish. If he gives you the word, then go ahead and write it up. He may still reject it, of course, but even so you won't be a complete loser. As one who has tried both in copious measure, I assure you there's even more fun in writing a science article than in writing a science fiction story.

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ON BOOKS
by Charles N. Brown

The Fountains Of Paradise by Arthur C. Clarke: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1979, 250 pp, $10.00, hardcover.

Titan by John Varley: Berkley/Putnam, 1979, 288 pp, $9.95, hardcover.

Catacomb Years by Michael Bishop: Berkley/Putnam, 1979, 384 pp, $10.95, hardcover

The Palace by Chelsea Quinn Yarbro: St. Martin's, 1979, 384 pp, $9.95, hardcover.

Hôtel Transylvania by Chelsea Quinn Yarbro: St. Martin's, 1978, 279 pp, $8.95, hardcover.

Tomorrow And Beyond edited by Ian Summers: Workman, 1978, 158 pp, $19.95, hardcover; $9.95, paper.

The Fantastic Art Of Boris Vallejo: Ballantine/Del Rey, 1978, 13 pp + 40 color plates, $12.95 hardcover, $7.95 paper.

The Third Book Of Virgil Finlay edited by Gerry de la Ree: de la Ree, 1978, 128 pp, $15.50, hardcover.

Wall Of Serpents by L. Sprague de Camp and Fletcher Pratt: Phantasia, 1978, 223 pp, $12.00, hardcover.

What Mad Universe by Fredric Brown: Pennyfarthing, 1978, 198 pp, $12.95, hardcover.

The King Of Terrors by Robert Bloch: Mysterious, 1977, 1978, 223 pp, $10.00, hardcover.

Angels Of Darkness by Cornell Woolrich: Mysterious, 1978, 217 pp, $10.00, hardcover.

Norgil The Magician by Maxwell Grant: Mysterious, 1977, 208 pp, $10.00, hardcover.

Lew Archer, Private Investigator by Ross MacDonald: Mysterious, 1977, 1978, 245 pp, $10.00, hardcover.

Foundation 1–8 edited by Peter Nicholls: Gregg, 1978, 800 pp, $35.00, hardcover.

Science Fiction Studies, Second Series edited by R.D. Mullen and Darko Suvin: Gregg, 1978, 336 pp, $15.00, hardcover.

Extrapolation 1–10 edited by Thomas D. Clareson: Gregg, 1978, 586 pp, $35.00, hardcover.

Locus 1968–1977 edited by Charles N. Brown and Dena Brown: Gregg, two volumes, 1978, 1988 pp, $95.00, hardcover.

Mission Of Gravity by Hal Clement: Gregg, 1978, 256 pp, $12.00, hardcover.

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Arthur C. Clarke has announced that *The Fountains of Paradise* is his last novel and the book he considers his best. I don't agree with the latter and hope the former isn't true. *The Fountains of Paradise* contains some excellent writing, a very effective juxtaposition of the past and the future, and enough startling ideas to fill several books. It's all written in Clarke's severely understated style, lacks excitement, has little or no characterization, and takes place in a sanitized hygenic future which I find completely unbelievable. The scenes written in the past, a history of Taprobane—a slightly fictionalized Ceylon—have an Eastern philosophical tinge which is fascinating. The idea of building an elevator to a synchronous satellite is certainly well thought out; and the echos (alternate plots?) of *Childhood's End,* the *Sands of Mars,* and *Rendezvous with Rama*—my three favorite Clarke novels—should appeal to all of his fans. But the tapestry is much too small; the characters, too limited; and the background, too sketchy. Clarke, circa 1978, is a much better writer than Clarke, circa 1953; but I'm sure I'll remember *Childhood's End* long after I've forgotten *Fountains of Paradise.* Clarke's best book—perhaps a Stapledonian view of the entire universe—still lies in the future. I hope he writes it.

Take some of the exotic ideas from Clarke's *Rendezvous with Rama,* add some of the wise-cracking dialogue from Heinlein's *Glory Road,* add a bit of Niven's *Ringworld,* sprinkle with some outrageous Philip José Farmer, and you might get an idea of what *Titan* by John Varley tastes like. I don't mean to imply that these things are all that discernible in the final product, since the simmering and seasoning are strictly Varley. But can you think of better ingredients to start with? Enough food for thought.

Titan by John Varley is an excellent novel set *in,* not on, a planetoid world near Saturn. There is an exciting trek through the lands of some satisfyingly alien creatures, plenty of melodrama, and a surprise ending which may or may not be a surprise to those who read closely. It works either way. The actual writing is very good, but not great; and the dialogue is excellent, although the humor sometimes gets too broad. The book is written from a strongly feminist viewpoint, and I found the lack of any effective or interesting male character disturbing. Reverse discrimination is irritating in fiction as well as in real life. Aside from that, it's a great book that makes Varley a top author instead of just an up and coming one. I'm already impatient for the sequel. One thing to keep in mind; be sure to read the whole book and not the

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sanitized version, cut by 10,000 words, which appeared in *Analog*.

Catacomb Years by Michael Bishop is a collection of his "Atlanta Dome" series reworked into an episodic novel. The new connecting material and the original final story, "Death Rehearsals," make it a true novel instead of just a connected series. Bishop's earlier novel, *A Little Knowledge,* takes place during one of the connecting sections. The two best short stories, "Old Folks At Home" and "The Samurai and the Willow," take on new meaning when viewed as part of a novel. The characterizations throughout are superb, and the writing is astonishingly good. Michael Bishop is one of the best of the new writers; *Catacomb Years* is his finest book to date.

The Palace by Chelsea Quinn Yarbro is accurately subtitled: "A Historical Horror Novel". The hero, Francesco Ragoczy da San Germano, is the most charming and sympathetic immortal vampire ever to appear in fiction. He and the few other well drawn fictional characters move against an accurate, complex, and very believable backdrop of fifteenth century Florence. The background is both the strength and weakness of the book. There's so much of it that it slows the story down considerably. If you don't mind a leisurely paced, accurate historical novel, try it. Its sequel, published earlier this year, is *Hôtel Transylvania,* inaccurately subtitled: "A Novel Of Forbidden Love". *Hôtel* is shorter, moves somewhat faster, and uses eighteenth century Paris as background. Otherwise, the same comments hold true. A third novel, set in Roman times, is in the works.

Tomorrow And Beyond edited by Ian Summers is a collection of modern science fiction art, mostly from paperback covers, beautifully reproduced in full color, without overprinting, and arranged according to theme. Summers's taste is impeccable, and this book should become the yardstick against which future collections should be judged. The 300 reproductions include work by many artists I've never heard of, because of the usual lack of credit line on paperback covers. For instance, I've seen Rowena Morril's work before, but did not know the artist. Her covers for *The Dreaming Jewels* by Theodore Sturgeon and *Nightwalk* by Bob Shaw are fantastically good. I'd love to see this book become an annual series featuring the best covers of the year. Highly recommended.

The Fantastic Art Of Boris Vallejo (pronounced val-YAH-hoe) is another winner. Vallejo, who signs all his work as "Boris," is an intensely realistic artist working in a fantastic medium. His sense of color and design are superb. There are far too many barbarian

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heroes for my taste, but I'd rather look at his than at Frazetta's. His cover for *Davy* by Edgar Pangborn is my favorite of this collection.

The Third Book Of Virgil Finlay edited by Gerry de la Ree is an assortment of Finlay's black and white work, mostly prior to 1957. It is limited to 1300 copies and is in the same format as the earlier two. It is available from Gerry de la Ree, 7 Cedarwood Lane, Saddle River NJ 07458.

Wall Of Serpents by L. Sprague de Camp and Fletcher Pratt, the final book in *The Incomplete Enchanter* series, is finally back in print after being unobtainable for fifteen years. The earlier two books in the series, *The Incomplete Enchanter* and *The Castle Of Iron,* two very popular fantasy books, were recently reprinted by Ballantine Books in an omnibus edition misleadingly titled *The Compleat Enchanter*. This third volume, published only in a limited edition in 1960, contains two stories: "The Wall Of Serpents," in which our intrepid hero, Harold Shea, journeys to the land of the Finnish epic *The Kalevala,* and "The Green Magician," which uses Irish mythology as a background. They're well-told pieces of humorous fantasy which have aged fairly well. This new edition, limited to 2,000 copies, is available directly from Phantasia Press, 13101 Lincoln St, Huntington Woods MI 48070. It has a new color jacket by George Barr.

Fredric Brown's humorous satire on science fiction fans, *What Mad Universe,* has been reissued in a limited, 750-copy edition with charming illustrations by Grant Canfield and a new introduction/appreciation by Philip Klass. Brown manages to parody nearly all the cliches of science fiction in this tour-de-farce. This new edition is available from Pennyfarthing Press, P. O. Box 7745, San Francisco CA 94120.

As you may have noticed, I tend to mention many small-press, limited-edition books in this column. These books, produced by enthusiasts, are shoestring operations that rarely turn a profit. The small presses are doing a marvelous job keeping older titles in print in finely produced editions and producing interesting books with limited commercial appeal. They need and deserve your support.

The Mysterious Press, which specializes in mystery fiction, is often mentioned in our sister magazine, *Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine*. They produce many books of interest to science fiction and fantasy readers as well. On hand are *The King of Terrors* by Robert Bloch, a collection of 14 tales of horror and terror; *Angels*

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Of Darkness by Cornell Woolrich, a collection of terror tales with a fine introduction by Harlan Ellison; and *Norgil The Magician* by Maxwell Grant, a book of magic and mystery by the creator of *The Shadow*. Some of the straight mystery books may also be of interest: *Lew Archer, Private Investigator* by Ross MacDonald, the first complete collection of Lew Archer short stories, is a must for all readers of detective fiction. To order these, and for a catalog, write: The Mysterious Press, P. O. Box 334, East Station, Yonkers NY 10704.

Books are not the only thing produced by small-press publishers. Frank Kelly Freas has a new set of six posters with his excellent artwork for the Starblaze book covers. For an order form complete with a color reproduction of each item, write: Polly & Kelly Freas, 4216 Blackwater Rd, Virginia Beach VA 23457.

Limited-edition books are not all published by small-press publishers. Gregg Press, part of a major reprint house, produces fine bound editions of science fiction and science fiction criticism for the library market. Each book is printed on acid-free paper and is made for years of constant use. Each also has a new introduction by a knowledgeable critic or fellow writer.

Foundation, with an introduction by Peter Nicholls, reprints the first eight issues of a British critical journal which contains some of the best reviews I've ever read. There are also autobiographical articles by Robert Silverberg, Samuel R. Delany, Brian Aldiss, Ian Watson, Ursula K. Le Guin, L. Sprague de Camp, and many others. *Science Fiction Studies, Second Series* edited by R.D. Mullen and Darko Suvin has a selection of articles from the most academic of critical journals. Be warned: reading academic criticism can be difficult and frustrating if you're not up on the jargon. *Extrapolation 1–10* edited by Thomas D. Clareson reprints the first ten volumes of a magazine that falls, editorially, somewhere in between the first two. There is also a two-volume reprint of the first 10 years of my own magazine, *Locus*. It weighs about 15 pounds.

In the fiction category, the prize of the current Gregg reprint series is *Mission Of Gravity* by Hal Clement, complete with an extra short story set on Mesklin and a technical article on how Mesklin was designed. There is also an excellent introduction by Poul Anderson. For information on these and other Gregg Press volumes, write: Gregg Press, 70 Lincoln St, Boston MA 02111.

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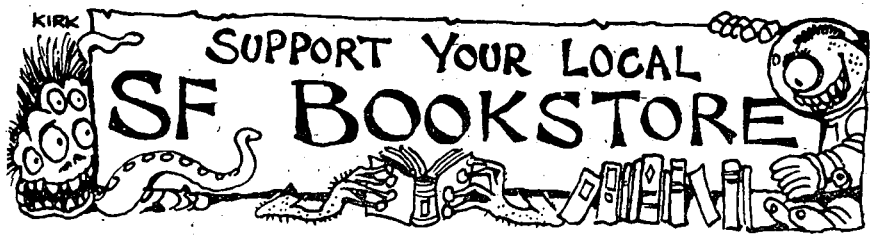

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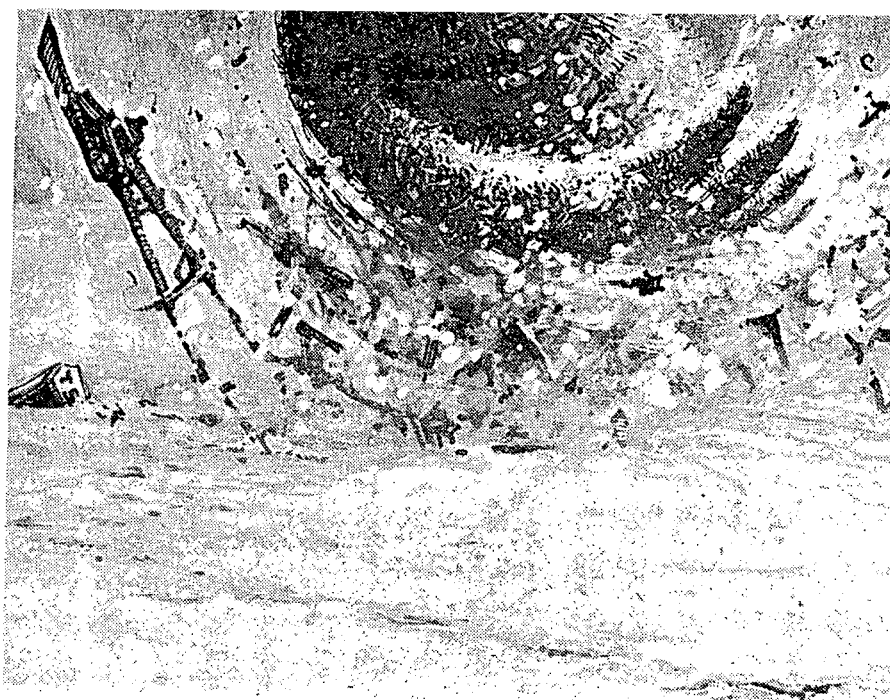

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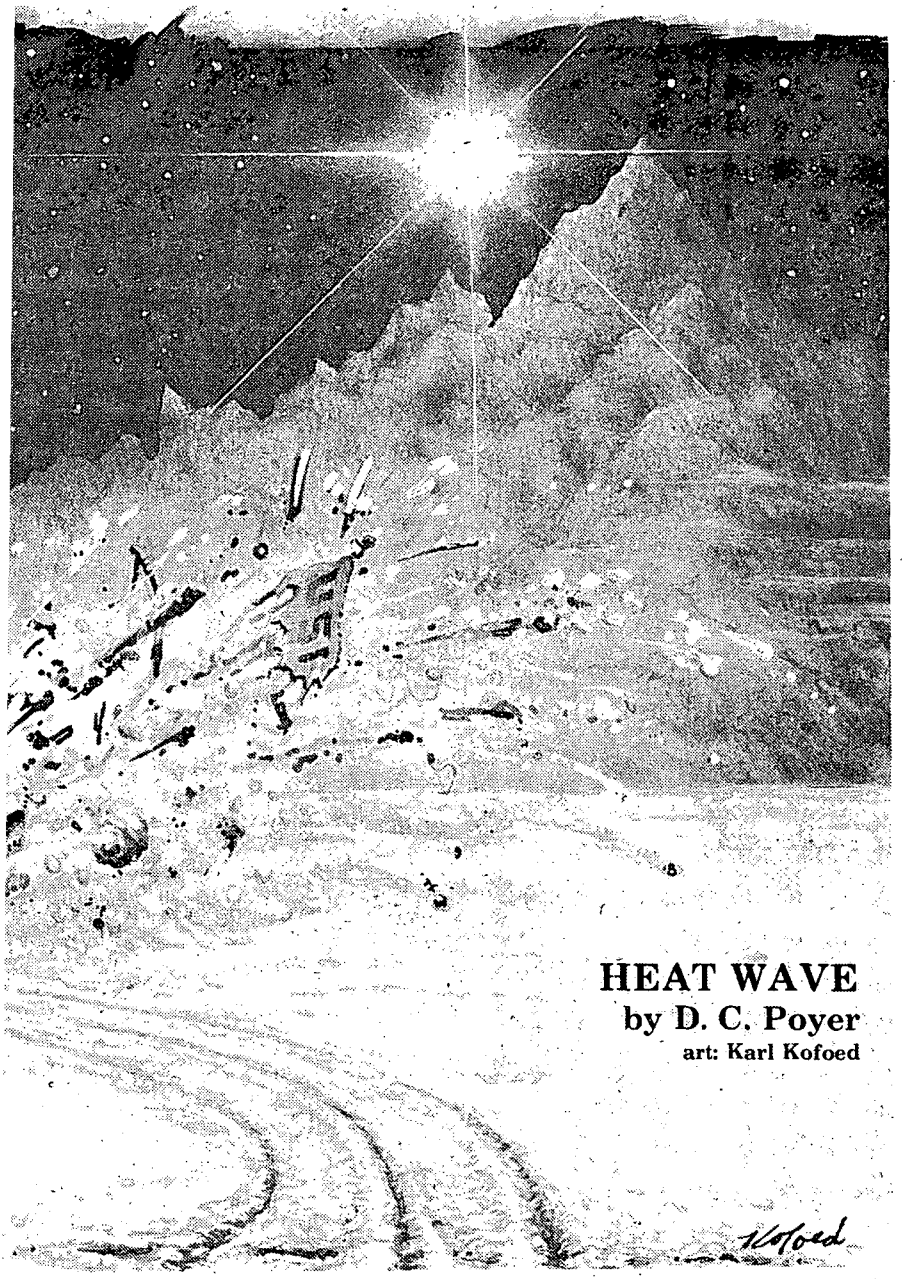

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The author, D. C. Poyer, was brought up in the hills of northwestern Pennsylvania. He says he was fortunate enough to be exposed to books early on. Spent four years at the U.S. Naval Academy in Annapolis, six years at sea thereafter. He left the service a year ago and has been writing with modest success since. Current projects are a nonfiction book and several concurrent stories and articles as well as trying to peddle a couple of completed adventure novels.

It was the lonely sound of the wind that Marra noticed first.

It had dropped for a moment, barely sighing over the ice, and except for the creaking and popping of cooling metal behind her, sounds that counterpointed the whisper of the wind, it was—silent.

Enormous.

Dead.

She took a step forward, feeling the snow squeak under her boots. She scuffed at the white surface: only a thin layer of wind-carried crystals over the sheen of hard ice beneath. She raised her eyes to the horizon.

It was straight. The white flatness of the ice sheet that covered T.5 from pole to pole stretched unbroken and empty to the razor-like line where the ice met the violet blue of the sky. Only to her left, far off, was the horizon sawtoothed by a range of jagged peaks. Save for them, and for the pale small sun that hung low over them, she was alone.

Marra shuddered as the wind rose again, biting through her clothing. And shuddering, she turned to look on the smoking wreck of her ship.

The speeding bubble she had piloted so far lay smashed and scattered along three hundred meters of ice. The snow behind it was torn up in a long furrow, littered with shattered equipment, and yellow flames flickered inside the pilot's module where it lay canted on the ice.

She walked back to the craft and bent to throw snow on the fire. It smoked heavily and then went out, hissing. She turned to look once more at the empty horizon.

Two thousand kilometers to the station, she thought.

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How will I ever make it?

She pushed the fear back and began pacing along the trail of wreckage, noting each bit of wire and twisted metal and integrating it into the diagrams she carried in her head.

Marra was a compact woman, dark-skinned and slim, with a figure under the bulky pilot's suit that once would have been called boyish. It was in the face that a millenium of space travel, genetic engineering, and interbreeding showed. It was almost a child's face, tiny in relation to the brow and head that rose above and behind it. But it was an alert face, childlike perhaps but far from childish, with large green eyes that looked out calmly on the wreckage of her hopes, flicking from item to item, evaluating, filing, integrating. And behind those calm eyes was a mind that was the most changed of all.

But a mind that despite its power was human.

She stopped after walking a hundred meters. She had enough data. The ship would never fly again.

She trudged back through the snow to the piloting module. The wind was rising and her dark cheeks were paling with frostbite. She paused at the hatch, glanced around the horizon again, and ducked inside.

The interior of the ship was dark and smelled of smoke and ozone. She passed a hand over several banks of controls; they did not respond. *No radio, no ultra wave, and not an erg of energy in the lifters*, she thought. She shrugged—the simplest human gestures had survived the longest—and opened a locker. From it she took food packets, a survival pack, a full space-suit and helmet. She pulled the suit on quickly, set the helmet to warm and circulate the frigid but oxygen-rich air of T.5, glanced around the module one last time, and carried the rest of her booty outside. She stood there with the pack at her feet, closed her eyes, and Called.

There was no answer. She was too far away from the station. *Well*, she thought, *I guess I've got to walk it.*

An hour later, when she turned around, the wrecked ship was only a dark speck, almost out of sight on the horizon. She turned again and trudged on, listening to the chuff-chuff of her own breath inside the helmet.

I left him because I hated him, she thought. *Well, he can't find me now. None of them can.*

"I'm not afraid," she said aloud, wincing as the words echoed inside the helmet. "I'm not afraid of a damned thing on this

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planet or any other."

Only of being alone, she heard herself reply.

Suddenly, Marra was afraid.

The long-drawn-out scraping boom of the falling ship echoed through the ice, reverberating through the miles-deep crust of ice like the tolling of vast slow bells.

Solothurn felt it, and stirred. He lay uneasily, feeling the distant vibrations trickle through his long body. He caught the last long, rending rasp of metal against ice and moved his muzzle like a seeking lizard.

There.

Hard to tell how far away, but now he had the direction. With a sudden massive squirm he shook several days' accumulation of drift from his body and rose from the shallow depression in the ice. He shook himself again, and the heavier, older rime-crusts shattered and fell bonging and tinkling to the surface, to be spun away immediately by the wind.

What had it been? Solothurn mulled it over slowly, maintaining his point like a skilled dog, wide pads of feet pressed solid to the planetary ice. He sensed the Herd sleeping quietly behind him, yards down in the ice, deep in patient hibernation, waiting for good weather to come again. Only he of all their number stood guard, drifting in and out of wakefulness, tortured always by the heat and the nearness of death.

Slow supercooled liquids moved faster now as his pads scuffed softly on the ice. He lifted his white muzzle to the hot air. The eyelids retracted slowly, with an audible grating sound, and he looked out upon the ice cap.

Brighter. The sun, only a less-remote star in Solothurn's youth, was a blazing ball now, sending radiance sparkling over the snow and making haloes of the veils of blown drift that rattled lightly against the animal's side.

He lowered his head against the glare and eased his bulk into a ponderous but rapid run.

Marra stopped after four hours of walking. Her legs felt like melting wax and the heavy, awkward survival pack was digging holes through her suit and into her back. She swung her burden down to the ice and collapsed onto it.

"I'm not going to make it on foot," she said aloud, watching the swirls of white puff by her. She propped her head on her hand,

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closed her eyes, and blanked her mind for two minutes.

When she came out of it she felt calmer. She Called again. No response.

It's the distance, she thought. T.5 was not much below Earth-size, but the terraforming station was almost on the equator, where the temperature had reached as high as 5°C. Soon it would be warm enough there to melt the ice. It would all melt, eventually, as the planet continued its inward spiral, pushed by the subtle engines at the station. Someday, in a few decades, it would reach a liveable temperature, and colonization could begin. Another habitable planet would be added to the teeming hundreds claimed by the sons of Man.

I'd like to be there to see it, she thought. *But walking two thousand kilometers is a little beyond me. Is this, after all, how I was meant to die?*

Marra sat motionless for several minutes. A warm glow seemed to be kindling at the core of her body. She leaned back against the pack, feeling her eyelids growing heavy, watching the ceaseless wind pull white curtains across the sky and feeling numbness creep inside the toes of her suit. She felt so comfortable . . . and the wind, no longer lonely-sounding, seemed, she thought, to be singing a song that was almost a lullaby. . . .

The wind.

Yes.

She jumped up. Needles in her feet and legs brought tears to her eyes. She stamped her boots into the snow, swung the pack to her back, and turned around. The wind struck her almost in the face, coming from a little on her left.

It might work. It has to work, she thought as she struggled against the blustering wind. With as smooth an ice surface as T.5 presented, the constant wind that the planet's slow heating generated, and a little help from luck, she could *sail* to the station.

The wreck was undisturbed except for the shallow drifts that were already creeping over its windward surface. She walked hurriedly along the rapidly filling furrow, plunging her gloved hands in from time to time to drag out metal tubing, wires, pieces of the strutting that had supported the buckled landing gear.

She laid several armfuls of junk in the lee of the piloting module, rearranged them on the ice, and integrated until she could visualize the finished product as well as if she had built hundreds. It took her about ninety seconds. She kicked the unneeded parts to one side and climbed back into the control room. A small ship

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such as hers carried no welding equipment, but she came out carrying hammers, cutters, and a hand-portable laser drill.

She quickly found that ten-millimeter sections of the main drive cables made excellent rivets. The frame went together quickly, though two of the tubing sections shattered; the intense cold made them brittle. She substituted the tougher strutting, heating it with the drill and bending it by hand to form two narrow runners held several centimeters apart by transverse members. Two long braces stretched from the runners in the center to support a smaller outrigger runner, barely a meter long. She kept the wind in mind as she worked, smiling when a gust pushed her off balance as she sawed or hammered.

The wind, she thought, must always blow, set in motion around the planet by its rotation and by the expansion of the sun-warmed air at the equator as the planet's orbit shrank. She could count, then, on having the wind always from behind and from her right. This put the outrigger on her left, to keep the sled from overturning. *Yes, that was right,* she thought, erecting a long piece of piping to serve as a mast, *I can't have every gust dumping me out on the ice.*

She had more difficulty with the sail; the tent was smaller than she had thought, and she had to alter the design for a simple fore-and-aft rig. She thought about that for several seconds, eyes narrowed as numbers whirred through her mind.

Yes, that would do.

The continual sunlight helped her to keep on, tired though she was. The sun circled slowly around the horizon, dipping only slightly lower as the hours went by. She worked, ate, rested by blanking her mind for a few minutes, stepped up her adrenals, and worked again.

When it was finished she stood back and integrated the interaction of the finished sled with the wind. Wind pressure; air resistance; the transverse friction of the runners, resisting the wind's quartering thrust; sliding friction as a function of weight and speed and temperature; and of course the increase of relative wind around the sail airfoil as the sled's speed increased.

It took almost a minute before she resolved the last vector, and smiled. It would work.

One more burst of energy and the sail was up and furled, a small frame to sit on fixed forward of the mast, and a great deal more food, tools, and spare materials than she could ever have carried tied securely to the outrigger. Then fatigue overcame her.

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She tied the sled dwon and crawled inside the smashed ship for shelter from the wind and slept.

Outside, the pale sun hesitated, then reluctantly slid from sight.

Night.

From his first burst of eager speed Solothurn had eased to a quick trot, slow-looking, clumsy-seeming, but a distance-eating pace that he could keep up across the ice for days on end. He ran for hours, eyes half-closed, muzzle pointed steadily into the wind.

He had felt no more sounds through the ice. Through his seismographically-sensitive pads of feet he heard only the slow grind of a trillion tiny shards of driven ice scouring down the surface of the planet. He mused dully as he lumbered along, thinking of what might lie ahead, thinking of the past, thinking of the great days.

The days when he had been young, running free with the Herd in the sparkling darkness, in the crackling, silent, wonderful cold. Then there had been no drift ice; the stars shone as coldly brilliant from the polished surface of the bare ice as from the darkness of the sky; the sun, faraway, hung like a yellow jewel above the mountains; and the air had been still, free of the wind that blew now endless like a hot breath from Hell. The whole planet silent, dark, and peaceful, save when the hundreds of the Herds moved slowly across the transparent ice, snuffling, panting, their bodies cooled gratefully by the thin, cold air.

Now, Solothurn thought dully, running, the Herd lay beneath the burning snow, leaving only one awake to guard; himself.

The hot air moved past his moving body, thick, fetid, scorching.

His eyes glared out with hate upon a changing planet.

Marra awoke.

It was dark inside the tilted module and the feeling was very strong for a moment, but fading, already, as she came out of the dream.

Something had been pursuing her, she remembered, but what it had been was beyond her memory now, thinning and vanishing even as she thought she grasped it.

"Time to go," she said aloud, to the curved, protecting walls around her. Only the wind answered her.

She picked up her helmet and stepped outside, gasping as the icy wind hit her like a door slammed in her face. She sealed the

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helmet quickly; too many breaths of the unwarmed morning air of T.5, she knew, and she would be coughing blood, lungs frozen.

She untied the sled and pushed it out from the lee of the wreck. The wire braces of the mast hummed in the wind and the furled sail drummed against the stays eagerly. She checked the sled carefully; food was aboard, tools, and a small stove; spare tubing and wire for repairs; a middle-level first aid kit; the one spare suit battery. She tugged on each wire, tightened one that had gone slack, and checked the riveted joints. The sled was ready.

Well, she thought, *so am I*. She climbed between the main runners and settled herself in the seat. She put her clumsy boots on the steering bar and reached up to the mast. The sail came rattling down and boomed out in the wind with a snap that skated the sled a meter to the left. She steered right as the sled began to move forward. The sail flapped loudly. Seeing suddenly that it had too much curve to guide the air as she had calculated, she pulled in at a corner of it and steered further to the right. The sail filled, tightened, and the sled moved faster. It began to turn into the wind and she steered left, then centered the steering bar that warped the leading edges of the runners. The sled trembled to a light gust, and a moment of panic startled her; had she missed some factor? It came back to a straight course, and suddenly the sail seemed to catch something and the sled accelerated smoothly, seeming to lift off the ice, and the wind of her passage began to roar around the plastic of her helmet. *There*, she thought, *the speed point;* moving faster than the wind, the sled lent speed to itself, making its own wind, the curved airfoils of its sails biting in and pulling, faster and faster in frightening acceleration.

All at once Marra realized that she was enjoying herself. The speeding sled surrounded her with sound; the sliding scrape of the runners, at three different pitches; the rhythmic s-s-s-ch of the outrigger as the sway of the sled pressed it now and again to the ice; the slow beat of the close-hauled sail as it luffed; the creak and hum of the frame, and the singing of the braces in the wind. The smooth ice surface flew by under her too rapidly to see, sending a fine spray of snow up from the leading edges of the runners. Marra smiled up at the straining sail; the wind, she thought, must be at least thirty KPH, and almost without conscious thought she solved the complex series of motion equations that gave her cause to smile. She was being bowled along at almost seventy kilometers per hour.

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In that happy thought she skated on through the long morning, keeping the faraway mountain range on her left. The sun rolled along the horizon before her, passing slowly behind the mountain crests, which seemed—as the hours passed—distant as ever. *In this clear air, they could be far away,* she thought. At noon, with the pale, heatless disc directly ahead of her, she Called.

Something. She strained for it, closing her eyes as the sled rocketed along, reaching for it. It wavered for a moment on the edge of her mind and seemed to subside. She opened her eyes, frowning. It had felt like an intelligence, an unTrained one. But all the station personnel were well Trained. *A native?* she thought, then shook her head. T.5 carried no native life above slow-growing lichens; it was too cold, far too close to the cold of deep space for animal or even advanced plant life. That had been confirmed long ago, before the orbit alteration had begun; her race did not disturb inhabited planets.

Puzzled, she sailed on. The sun moved slowly on its way, sinking back now toward the distant horizon to her right. She ate a little, reaching with one hand to her pack. She skated onward. *Towards evening,* she thought, *I'll stop and find a place to spend the night.*

Above her the wind cried shrilly in the rigging.

Bracing his legs against the grade, Solothurn slid down a scree-covered slope, sending a little cascade of rocks and shale rattling ahead. At the bottom of the ravine he snuffled under the overhanging ledge he had spotted from the ridge. He grunted, pushed the rock aside with one leg, and found a few brownish patches of lichen. He tore at them greedily, relishing the coarse texture and the subtly changed flavor.

The Herd, he remembered, had grazed at such mountain oases; moving slowly across the vast stretches of ice between the mountain peaks, they never overharvested the lichens. Scarce even then, the beds were now a few pitiful patches, hidden under overhangs and in deep valleys where they were shielded from the unbearable sun.

He swallowed the last of the lichen and sniffed along the ravine, finding two more patches and eating them too. His stomach rumbled uncomfortably, and he belched up a rock that he had swallowed by mistake.

Hunger partially appeased, he scrambled back up to the barren ridge he had been following since he entered the mountains and

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looked out across the ice plain beyond.

Ah, he thought. *Something out there.* Something black, a faraway dark speck on the whiteness. Far as it was, it was moving against the whiteness of the ice cap. Moving, Solothurn saw, on a line that would bring it past the mountains near nightfall, and in a direction that if maintained would bring it to the Herd.

The hatred uncoiled in his soul. He lowered his muzzle and growled, deep in his throat.

Whatever it was, it would not pass.

Dusk came.

Marra stood near the sled, the laser drill in her hand, and looked up at the mountains. *Vast,* she thought. *There's a whole world of fissures and caves and valleys back in those mountains. I wonder if they checked them all before they decided this planet was empty?*

She saw shadows creeping up the flanks of the peaks and turned back to her work. She aimed the laser drill, dialed the beam to 'tight', and drilled four neat holes a meter deep into the ice. Holstering the drill, she took a container from the pack on the sled, held four of the pellets in her hand for a moment, and then dropped them into the still-steaming holes. She ran back to the sled.

The explosion sent shards of ice spinning in all directions. After the roar thrummed away she walked back to the crater and began clearing out the hole. When it was free of ice she secured the sled and took down the sail. She stretched it across the hole in the ice, prepared a hot meal in the makeshift shelter, and lay back to sleep as full darkness fell.

She found that she couldn't. She was still disturbed by that mental contact. *There was something out there,* she thought. *Of that I'm sure.*

She was tired, and her thoughts drifted. *I can't have travelled less than four hundred kilos today,* she thought, looking up at the underside of the sail, hearing the wind roar outside. *If the sled, and the ice, and the wind, and I hold out, I can be at the station in a week. And long before that I'll be in Calling range.*

She smiled in the darkness, remembering with amusement her fear at being alone here. She was going to make it back. She felt sure of it. And then she remembered that strange half-contact. *What could it have been?*

She decided to Call once more before she went to sleep, and stif-

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fened as her mind opened.

It was near now.

Dreadfully near. And it was clearer. Definitely, chillingly not human; not even unTrained human. She looked around hurriedly. Starlight and the first flickers of auroral light washed dimly over the packs and tools around her through the fabric rippling above her head. *A weapon; I need a weapon.* There, the laser drill; that would do. She pulled back a corner of the sail and looked out into the roaring darkness.

Drift patterned and scraped on her helmet. Above her the stars shone unwinkingly, brilliant and serene, the green and yellow rays of aurora playing here and there like searchlights. She could see nothing threatening. But the strange presence was near, frightfully near.

Ignoring the intense cold and the terror that, like a slow reptile uncoiling, cared nothing for her logic and all that she was and could do, Marra crawled out onto the ice and stood up, leaning into the blustering, invisible wind. She dialed the drill to wide and swung it round, using it as a flashlight.

Something white moved amid the scurrying clouds of snow. She swung the light back to it but it was gone.

Shivering, she stood there, irresolute. She tried to integrate the situation. It was useless. She had no data. The planet, so far as any human knew, was lifeless. There was nothing there, could be nothing there.

A sound came out of the wind. A shuffling sound, a murmur or rumble. She turned around swiftly, pointed the beam, but caught only the impression of something enormous and white before the flurries closed over it again.

She called to it, putting all her concentration into it, and immediately blanked her mind for reception.

Anger. Fear. Determination.

She came back. She had touched it, she knew. Inchoate emotions from a mind out there beyond her light. Primitive, limited, but not the mind of an animal. She turned off the drill and crouched low and motionless. Now she felt the vibration of its tread through the ice.

Marra dilated her pupils and waited. The rumbling noise came again, closer.

There! She saw it. An immense, humped shape looming against the stars. She raised the drill, closed her pupils down, and switched it on.

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Solothurn froze. The light stabbed, a miniature sun, blinding the great lidded eyes. He stopped, confused. The strange thought touched his mind again.

Friend. Friend.

He hesitated, caught between hate and fear and his desire to believe.

Friend. Close-feeling. Warm, warm-feeling.

The threat of warmth jolted Solothurn from his paralysis. He shook his great head to free his eyes from the light, and charged.

The light blinked out and he roared as his forefeet encountered a hole in the ice. He scrambled out and crashed into the anchored sled. Guy wires pinged and snapped and fragile tubing and struts shattered as Solothurn trampled them in panicky fury, the great pads crashing down on the wreckage again and again, sending the squeal of tearing metal to Marra, lying flat and terrified on the ice.

The terrible cry of triumph roared over her and spun away into the wind.

Part of it integrated suddenly. *Friend,* called Marra. *Friend . . . closeness . . . COLD.*

Solothurn paused, one foot lifted above the remains of the sled. He had just trampled the stranger into the ice. Or had he?

He spoke a challenge in the rumbling language of the Herd.

Marra called.

Friend. One like you.

Of Herd?

Not-Herd. Still friend.

The obscure shapes flitted between their minds. Solothurn was suspicious. This was a new thing. *Not-Herd, yet alive?* He tried to understand.

Like Herd?

She sent a mental image of herself, not sure how it would come across to the puzzled being in the darkness.

Not like me . . . are you hurt?

Not hurt, lost. Parted from own Herd. Alone.

Whatever it was, she thought, it understood 'alone'; she felt it. It, too, needed others of its kind. She was beginning to piece together more of the strange half-emotions, half-images that its thoughts were composed of. They were confused, illogical, dim, but not unintelligent. *Journeying to find my own Herd,* she sent.

Where?

She thought, *The direction of the high sun.*

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Your Herd lives under the sun?

Yes, she thought, and felt the beast's attitude change from half-convinced puzzlement to suspicion again.

Herds cannot live there. Too hot.

And then suddenly it all integrated and she nodded slowly to herself in the darkness. Too hot for Herds. The charge when she had offered the promise of warmth. The mystery of an animal on a planet 'too cold' for life.

The terraforming of T.5 was roasting its inhabitants to death.

"I'm sorry," she said aloud, without thinking.

Why?

The heat . . . she thought. *We did not know that your kind were here. We did not mean to harm you.*

A dawning tide of wonderment. *Your Herd . . . caused sun to grow?*

Yes.

Rage overwhelmed Solothurn. This time he made out, upright on the starlit ice, the small being that talked in his mind, and he charged.

Marra saw it gather itself, felt from the wave of anger that flooded into her mind that it was about to attack. She dialed the laser drill to a fine beam and aimed, her finger on the switch. The animal swung into motion toward her, and she felt the ice shake beneath her feet. It towered over her, and she caught what came across to her human mind as the smell of her own blood. At the last possible second she focussed all her Talent and struck, with all the power of the Trained neohuman mind.

The tons of hurtling bulk seemed to go suddenly pilotless. The treelike legs folded and the long body met the surface with a resounding crash, slid along the ice for several meters, and came to rest within an arm's length of the woman.

Marra looked at the arm that held the laser drill. She began to shake, and the drill fell to the ice and pieces of its cold-weakened case skittered away into the darkness. She covered her face and one by one turned off the involuntary reflexes and adrenal secretions until, slowly, the shaking stopped and she became calm enough to take a step forward and kneel beside the massive head.

Kneeling, she sent a tendril of thought into the motionless brain. Very gently, she touched and then explored the edge of the animal's consciousness. Thoughts, clearer now, rang in her own mind like distant, muffled screams.

Can't move. Can't see. Dead? Herd is lost now. Strange little

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thing it was—killed—

Sliding under the imprisoned consciousness, she nudged its ego here, pried at it there. She invaded, spread herself round the fragile membrane of its selfness. It screamed soundlessly but was powerless to stop her. It struggled like a man being engulfed slowly by quicksand.

Marra closed over it; the ego was her captive. She contracted its boundaries, squeezed her mind-hands around it, till her Training told her that the fragile membrane between I and I would break with the slightest additional pressure.

She locked it there and came back. She found herself slumped against the animal—Solothurn was its—his—name, she remembered—and felt the icy coldness of his flesh draining her own warmth even through the insulated suit. She realized that he was even colder than the surrounding night.

No wonder, she thought, *he hates even the thought of warmth.* She moved an arm's length away and squatted beside the long body, watching tiny drifts building up around it, contemplating her next move. *Right or wrong, it's my only chance now to get back,* she thought.

And it meant more than that, she suddenly realized. If she didn't make it back to T.5 station, everyone of the dimly-remembered Herd she had glimpsed through the other's mind would die, killed without malice or even knowledge by the terra-forming of a planet that was 'too cold' for life.

It's not a decision or a choice, she thought, forcing herself to be callous. *It's a necessity. And I'm going to do it. Because—I'm going to make it back.*

Marra closed her eyes, steeled herself, and went back in. She found the motor centers and stood the animal up. He swayed, legs splayed, but like a sleepwalker he stood erect, eyes closed.

The short night of the high latitudes was ending and she could make out the shattered remains of her sled. Salvaging what she could, she began to load Solothurn with food and what gear was left intact. Some of the spare wire was long enough for her to loop around his neck. To this she tied the bundles she made with the torn sail and swung herself up to his back. She bent to the nodding skull, went in, found the subconscious, the obeyer. *I am Solothurn,* she thought. *I walk!*

They walked. Clumsily at first, then at a smoother cadence as she visualized his limbs as her own. Her own ego, and part of her own lower minds, linked with the reflexes and body of the power-

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ful animal beneath her.

And still she felt the impotent mind writhing in terror inside the cell of his own skull. He tried to roar, to scream. She fought him down, with ease but with revulsion at herself, contained him, and finally, mercifully, found the key that put him into a deep and soundless sleep.

Dawn lasted for hours as the sun coasted slowly up across the mountains. She looked at the peaks for a long time, remembering from somewhere the taste of gray-green lichen, their crunchiness and the delight of rooting them from the rocks amid that Herd now slumbering, she thought with a sudden stab of pain, *slowly dying,* on the other side of the mountains.

And that's what I have to prevent, she thought sleepily, her body swaying atop the massive body that loped along beneath her. *When I reach the station they must stop the project, reverse T.5's closing orbit. These animals are intelligent. Not at human level yet—maybe they never will be; but given a few decades of tutelage, the scientific method, the amassed lore of a thousand years of human technology, they may surprise us.*

Drowsing, late in the afternoon, she relaxed her hold for a moment.

Solothurn awoke. He awoke enraged, but baffled. He felt movement—he was running. He could see, but only fuzzily, as if he shared his vision with someone else. He strained to see clearly. There was something bright ahead—something far too bright to—

The sun! He was running full tilt into the sun!

Solothurn grabbed for control. Panic gave him power and he almost gained it before the invisible curtain dropped in his mind and sleep descended like a starless night.

Marra sat bolt upright, teeth fixed in her lip. *Close, so close,* she thought. *I almost fell asleep.*

Naturally he fears the sun, she thought, looking down at the animal's broad neck. *I'm riding him toward certain death. The question is—how close can I get to the station before self-preservation becomes too strong for me to counter?*

She tightened her lock on the sleeping mind.

When night came she saw Solothurn bedded down and wearily closed off the rest of his mind and then his body. He slept. She turned up the heat in her suit and rolled herself in the tent fabric in the lee of his body. She rested, cleaning up her blood as best as she could; but even with her kidneys speeded up she could feel the toxins accumulating.

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She knew she could not sleep. Something felt empty inside her, as if under her breasts pressed a bubble of the ultimate void. *Loneliness,* she thought. *With so many others, even with him at last, I was lonely. And here too I feel lonely.* She reached out a hand to touch the bulk of the sleeping animal. *And pain,* she thought. *Pain at what I'm being forced to do. Poor, poor animal, far from his kind.*

It was a long night, longer than the night before; she was nearer the equator. As soon as it was light enough to see she woke Solothurn and climbed aboard.

Two more days passed.

Dawn again.

Marra sat on the snowy surface, eyes glassy with fatigue, and watched the animal awake. He moved his head slowly to look at her, lying motionless on the slightly rotten ice.

You're killing me.

She watched him. He tried his forelegs experimentally, looked at her again, then started to get up. After a try or two he succeeded.

Ho, he said, without triumph. *I'm up.*

"So you are," she said. She understood his thoughts quite well by now and thought, *he probably understands mine almost as well.* But she was tired now. Far too tired to care.

Almost, he said. His muzzle moved to find the rising sun. He blinked painfully. *Large sun. Will be hot at noon.*

Yes, we have come quite a distance, she thought dreamily.

As if he caught the weakness, the disjointedness of her thoughts, he sidled toward her. His great pads eased their weight softly onto the damp snow. *You are not content to kill me. Your kind are killing my Herd as well.*

We didn't know. When I tell them, they will stop. We can make the sun small again.

I believe you can. But I don't believe you will.

Why?

You are killing me. Your people are a vicious Herd.

I had to ride you. Not just for my own survival. I would not risk your life for that. But for your Herd's. I do it because I must.

Solothurn towered above her, his front pads only inches from her outstretched legs. *You ride me no longer.*

Yes, she thought, this time to herself alone, *yes, I must.*

Unutterably weary, mustering all her reserves, she struck. Sol-

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othurn roared, twisting his head wildly as if to throw her mind.

Submit.

I die if I do.

She tried to slide under his self. Ego and subconscious would not be split. It was a conflict not of control but of survival, and the whole organism revolted against the alien command.

Sleep, she thought desperately, on the edge of it herself.

I must not sleep. I must return to the Cold and to the Herd. I must not sleep or I will die.

She closed her eyes, feeling dizzy. She saw herself lying on the snow under his head. Flashes of herself through his eyes. A puny, weak, but merciless creature that she hated with all the force that the killing heat had left to her.

Submit. It is the only chance to save the Herd.

Lies.

Do you not know me by now? I do not lie.

I hate you and your kind, killer.

Are you so certain? To risk the future of your race?

Certain. You torture me for your own survival. Your thoughts are hard, closed. You stay alone, within yourself.

Look then, she thought.

All her defenses dropped, and for an instant like the flash of a shutter she saw Solothurn seeing himself through her eyes seeing herself through his eyes like an infinite tunnel of mirrors and then she sealed her mind again.

Do you see? Do you believe?

There was no answering thought. She felt its awe at the contents of her mind, heaped with the wonders of space, of many planets and cultures, of the technology that had finally outrun computers and could be comprehended only by the neohuman brain. She felt the surprised instant when, half-convinced, he dropped his guard, and she leaped.

Solothurn fell crying into the deep pit of night.

She got up weakly from the ice, swayed, and dragged herself to the blank-eyed animal. She raised a hand to touch him, feeling sorrow turn in her stomach. For the first time since she had taken over, she closed her eyes and Called.

Hello! Who's that?

T.5—T.5! Is this T.5 station?

No, I'm Rana. I'm from the station, but I'm out here alone, checking a weather monitor. Where are you? I can barely hear you; I'm a Class Three.

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I'm a Two. My ship crashed. I need help. Can you home on me?

Yes, I can. I have a small flier. I'm coming. Off.

Off, she thought. She turned her attention back to the animal in time to see him rock very slowly forward to his knees. She stepped back in alarm.

Very slowly, he collapsed onto his side and rolled belly up. The growing light of day picked out the grotesque swellings that ribbed his underbelly.

Awed, she gave him a little control. Slowly, reluctantly, Solothurn's mind swam to the surface.

Dying.

No, she thought. *No! I'm being rescued! You can go now.*

Dying . . . came the thought. A random image crossed her mind, visual; white flanks, cold stars, dark . . . the Herd, moving across the ice.

The taste of lichen, as it had been in his youth.

Clean, bare ice, the popping and creaking of it as it took weight at minus one hundred Centigrade.

Another animal, to Marra's mind looking like them all, but with swirling, unfathomed emotions attached to it. . . .

The dying eyelids slid open, and she saw the sheen of liquid water on their surface. Only then did she realize how warm it was.

Live! Live! You can go back. . . .

Solothurn is dying, came the faint thought. *And the Herd I was to guard—*

They will live! She thought; seeing the silver gleam in the sky, but no longer caring. *They'll be saved, now that we know!*

Liar, came the almost inaudible thought, streaked with anger and with the terrible fear of a thinking being confronted with the ultimate, ultimate void.

It integrated.

Marra stood up, seeing the solution coalesce in her mind like the answer to a problem in tensor analysis. Man would need a bridge to the Herd, a way of understanding their minds, their culture. Someone who knew them inside and out. Someone who, still thinking like a human, knew this strange, solitary race as if he had lived his life among them.

And even her emotions agreed.

She bent over the dying beast and closed her eyes. She Reached. Like a gentle hand around a bird, she curled her mind around his fading dream, squeezed it tighter, tighter still, feeling him flutter

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with death-terror and hate, tighter still, feeling the I-membrane reach the trembling point of balance. . . .

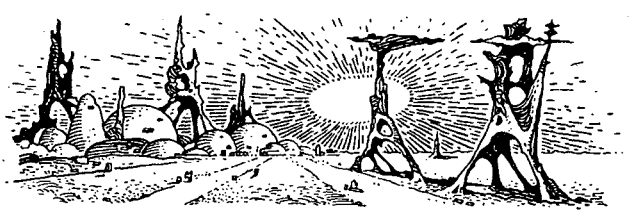
She stabbed, and burst it, and he flooded across, into her.

The flier slid to a stop beside her. The cabin door opened, and a young man, anxious-looking, jumped down to the snow, sinking into it. He goggled for a moment at the immense carcass, motionless on the snow, and then walked toward her.

"Hello. I came as fast as I could. What the hell is that thing? What are you doing out here all alone?"

The woman seemed to him to have to tear her eyes away from the animal. Slowly, she turned to look at the man, and for a fleeting second he had the impression that *two* faces smiled at him.

"We're not alone," they said.



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THE THREE ROBOTS OF PROFESSOR TINKER

by Martin Gardner

Professor Lyman Frank Tinker, head of the Artificial Intelligence Laboratory at Stanford University, was the twenty-first century's top designer of robots. One afternoon, for a seminar test, he brought to the classroom three female robots, all young, attractive, unclothed, and absolutely identical in appearance. He seated them on three chairs in front of the class.

"One of these girls," said Professor Tinker, "is programmed always to speak truly. Another is programmed always to lie. The third is programmed so she sometimes speaks truly, sometimes falsely. The decision is made by an internal randomizer. Your problem is this. In how few questions can you identify the truther, the liar, and the sometimer?"

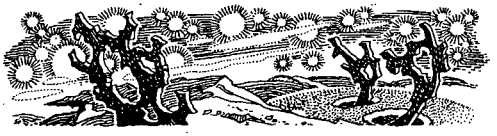
The second smartest student in the class asked the following three questions:

1. To the lady on the left he said, "Who sits next to you?" The robot answered: "The truther."

2. To the center lady he said, "Who are you?" The robot answered: "The sometimer."

3. To the lady on the right he said, "Who sits next to you?" The robot answered: "The liar."

From the three answers the student correctly identified all three robots. How did he do it? See page 51 for the answer.



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THE ORIGINS OF THE MATERIAL WORLD

Long before the Earth was formed,
it was postulated that the nothingness
  which existed everywhere
  in the universe
could be condensed and compacted
into a state of fluid equilibrium.
In this way it would form the sub-stratum
of the material world.

With the help of a primitive compression chamber,
small bits of nothingness
were first compacted into ideas
  however fleeting.
A person would get an idea
then immediately forget it.
Much head scratching was in evidence.

Sometime later,
  though technically
  in an eternal world of nothingness
  time doesn't exist,
the first idea was captured and stabilized.

The mechanical device to accomplish this feat
resembled a think tank
  with a vacuum cleaner attached
  to the end of its hose.
One by one these captured ideas
were transferred into a larger chamber.

Then the unanticipated happened:
the trapped ideas began mating with one another,
  and freak of nature that it was,
their offspring were genetically mutated.

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These biologically altered ideas
were born into the world as material objects:
Planets, trees, books, animals,
clouds, gothic cathedrals, rocks,
rainbows, etc.
Things rained down from the sky
in a torrential downpour,
until the world of nothingness melted away
like snow in a warm spring rain.

—Peter Payack

NOTE TO TEACHERS

Can we help you? We would like to participate in your classroom activities, especially if you are teaching SF as a subject or using SF in writing or literature courses. To do this, we need to know what you need. Do you use a teaching guide? If so, how is it arranged? Do you think the stories in *IASFM* are suitable for use in your class? What do you currently use in class? If you decide to use *IASFM* as your source of SF material, what kind of instructor's material would you need to do this? In short, we'd like some input from you. Please write us at PO Box 13116, Philadelphia PA 19101, and tell us how we can help.

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JACK GAUGHAN

by Ginger Kaderabek

art: Jack Gaughan

"A science fiction cover should be a small travel poster to another world," says Hugo-winning science fiction illustrator Jack Gaughan. Cover artist Gaughan has spent most of the past two decades posting hundreds of those small travel posters.

Born John Brian Francis Gaughan Sept. 24, 1930, in a Springfield, Ohio, hospital which "promptly burned down," Gaughan grew up in Springfield drawing "awful comic strips" and reading science fiction. He got interested in science fiction "probably because it was easier for me as a kid to identify with science fiction than with the handsome young men and beautiful women" in the movies and popular magazines. "Mars was a hell of a lot more accessible to me than Hollywood." Also, science fiction was something that no one else he knew liked—making it his own private world. "You had to think some—it was more challenging than what the duke and lady were doing to the lord, which was what they were printing in those days."

Famous Fantastic Mysteries held the first science fiction he read and A.E. Van Vogt's *Slan* and *The Weapon Shops of Isher* were the first pure science fiction he came across.

His art, like his reading, developed in part because he had asthma as a child and couldn't move around much. He had to do something and drawing comic books was easy to do.

He was educated in the parochial school system in Springfield with "no particular predilection for drawing." Nevertheless, he was admitted to the now defunct Dayton Art Institute in Dayton, Ohio, where "some little discipline was imposed." His love of science fiction followed him, and much of his school work was on science fiction themes, including numerous dragons and attempts at "She" from the H. Rider Haggard novels.

The idea of making a living from his art came through his father, who was a pressman at the plant in Springfield where the great magazines of the day such as *Colliers* and *Woman's Home Companion* were printed. The originals of the *Colliers* illustrations by great illustrators were sent to the plant. "I suddenly realized that a human hand had made these pictures. Eventually I

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thought I'd like to give that a try. Then I got into the Dayton School of Art and a whole other world opened up to me."

A two-year interruption from 1952 to 1954 saw him picking up cigarette butts and painting a huge mess-hall mural for the U.S. Army. After his tour, he returned to school for a year and then drifted to New York.

To Gaughan, the major science fiction illustrators of the day were Virgil Finlay and Lawrence Sterne Stevens, both of whom drew complicated line drawings. "These appealed to me and seemed to be something I could do," so he made up a number of samples illustrating stories in print, including a number of stories from *Astounding Science Fiction.*

One was a drawing of a man crying and the other was of a six-legged horselike animal with large hoofs. He sent these off in 1947 to John W. Campbell, editor of *Astounding,* and received a reply to the effect that tears don't come out of the outer corners of the eyes and that those animals couldn't possibly have had hooves that big. Now Gaughan had cut an onion to see how tears flow and the author of the story in question had described the animals' hooves as as "big as dinner plates," so Gaughan fired back an angry letter to Campbell. Campbell responded by asking Gaughan to come by when he was in New York, "and that's how I did the one illustration I did for John Campbell," Gaughan said.

He had also done several hand-separated hardcover jackets for *The People of the Comet, The Radio Man,* and other books for the Fantasy Publishing Co. Inc. in California, and a goodly number of fan drawings for such fan magazines as *Fantasy Advertiser* and *Odd* under his own name and that of Francis Jonbrian. In addition, he illustrated a history of Pennsylvania which he has been told is still being used in Pennsylvania schools. With this experience behind him, he decided to go to New York to work on a career in art.

"At the age of 23, I decided it was time to run away from home," Gaughan laughed. "I had just illustrated my second book and I decided to go to New York and see what I could do." He stayed with illustrator Hannes Bok, and after he returned his father's car, had assets of about 75 cents, plus his GI unemployment. In order to get his GI unemployment check, he had to go to a veterans service for artists and show his portfolio and a list of people he had contacted in the last week to prove he was looking for work. "I was doing pretty well on $29 a week and I wanted to see New York," Gaughan said, so he decided to put together a

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portfolio no one would want—a portfolio based on drawings by Will Eisner, the creator of "The Spirit," in PM *(Preventive Maintenance),* an Army comic book on maintenance. He outsmarted himself, for in three days Hal-Ben Associates, a company associated with Will Eisner, hired him and he did thousands of stylized drawings for booklets Eisner was doing on such subjects as farm machinery. During the whole period, he never met Eisner, except in the form of nasty notes saying things such as "Watch the sketches, dummy." Many years later, in one of life's little coincidences, while Gaughan was art director of the short-lived science fiction magazine *Cosmos,* he finally met Eisner and asked him to do a centerfold of "The Spirit" for the magazine.

After that, he worked for various studios around New York and finally took a job as assistant art director with Mike Dumont Associates, a small advertising agency dealing mainly with real estate and farm machinery. But the art director hired at the same time never showed up and Gaughan suddenly found himself art director. He knew nothing about production matters and ended up calling a guy at the production department of the New York *Times,* where some of the ads were to run. Over the next few months, this *Times* employee, whom he never met, taught him the job over the phone.

He went on to other art director jobs, once drawing a satellite for Grumann Aircraft. The company called back to ask how he knew so much about the satellite they had planned—his knowledge of course stemmed from his interest in science and science fiction.

Gaughan's next step was filmstrips and some movies, mainly for industrial firms, on such diverse subjects as how to give oral penicillin, and pig disease. During that period, he was once chased out of the IBM boardroom after idly suggesting that a second film on a 707 computer be called something like "Son of 707."

However, the film business is a "business of promoters" which rises and falls periodically. During one such slack period about 18 years ago, his wife Phoebe "suggested that if we were not to starve and give our son Brian to the orphanage, I had better do something. Actually, she suggested that instead of doing tons of anonymous drawings, I do what I liked to do and see if I could get some gentle soul to pay me for it. Science fiction seemed the market to try, so I spent the summer trying to teach myself to paint." Eventually he did begin to sell some paperback covers, in part, he

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said, because he was at the right place at the right time when publishers needed more of a science fiction element for the covers of their expanding science fiction lines.

His first paperback sale was to Don Wollheim, then science fiction editor at Ace, and he has continued to do a great deal of work for Wollheim, first at Ace and now at DAW Books. Gaughan commented, "After my first paperback cover commission, I learned from Phoebe that for the better part of a year we had been supported by a local grocer named Charlie Dilger, even to the extent of putting cash advances on his bills. Had not Don Wollheim bought my first cover painting, I could now be successfully retired as a grocery clerk."

So, he said, "I painted a lot more covers and did more black and white illustrations and a lot of fan drawings because after the years of turning out all that anonymous stuff, the feedback I got from the fans was food for the soul."

Gaughan's work was most visible in the late 1960s and early '70s, particularly during his stint as art director for *Galaxy* Magazine. "At that time I was the only fellow, with the exception of Kelly Freas, who was supporting himself in the field. I got $15 a drawing and maybe $500 to $750 for a cover, so I had to do a lot of work to support my family."

When *Galaxy* was bought by UPD Publishing Corp., Gaughan was asked to be the art director for the magazine. "The original notion was that I would send out stories and pick the artists to illustrate them. What happened is that the magazine was put together on Thursday and the art had to be done by Monday. . . . That's why it was only me—I didn't have time to send out any stories." Either he would be sent the stories on Thursday or editor Ejler Jakobsson would read outlines of the stories over the telephone and he would tape the outlines. He would then do each illustration by turning on the tape recorder and illustrating the stories described. Twice all the art was lost by the printer and he had to illustrate the whole magazine in one day from memory. He tried to do the iliustrations in as many styles as possible, he said, but generally "the experience was kind of an artistic suicide. I became a machine drawing like that, instead of an intelligent animal making decisions."

Gaughan has done less work in recent years, but it's not of his own choosing. He speculated that one reason for the decrease may have been his moving to Rifton, near Kingston in upstate New York, about 12 years ago. He and his family were living in a

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rented house in New Jersey at the base of the Palisades and he had an idea of giving his two children room to grow.

"I'm not harder to work with but I'm less available up here. Down there I made myself available and dependable. I never missed a deadline in my life and probably that dependability got me all the work I did."

Also during that period he had won both the fan and professional Hugo in one year—probably the only artist ever to do so, since the rules have since been changed—and later two more professional-artist Hugos. He had also been one of the few artists ever to be guests of honor at a World Science Fiction Convention and had been guest of honor at several other conventions.

"Another thing that put people off was all the Hugos and the guest-of-honors and I think everyone thought my prices would go up. They didn't, but I was too old and too dignified to go out and scrounge for work."

Another problem is that Gaughan disagrees with current trends in science fiction art. "The field has gone in one direction and I stayed where I was. I can do the contemporary artwork, but I don't like it. It's not that I don't like the immense technique, but little of it seems to have come from someone's heart. There's not much done with any degree of feeling. Everything of mine, no matter how contrived it was, was based on my own feelings. I insisted on reading the story and everything was a gut reaction."

Today, Gaughan contends, many illustrators are asked to paint by committee—told what colors to use, what sort of girls to paint, and so on. "As the business gets bigger, so does it become impersonal in regard to the art." The decisions have been taken from the hands of the painter and are now in the hands of editors and editorial committees who are not art-oriented, Gaughan said. "As a consequence, one sees a lot more editorial content in today's paintings than one sees graphic considerations—and a little soul is lost too. This saddens me. We are no longer painters, but merely picture producers and assemblers of images. If someone once more says to me about a projected cover, 'Make it reminiscent of *Star Wars*,' I just might spit in his eye." He commented reflectively, "I'd like to be doing more work, but I'd still like to do it on my own terms—and that won't happen."

Science fiction is tending to become ingrown, Gaughan said, and nowhere is it less progressive than in its art. As art director of *Cosmos*, "one thing I tried to do was to drag the art of science fiction by its bootstraps from the 1920s. I wasn't successful, but I

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tried. In many ways, science fiction fans still want concepts of art out of the 1930s."

As for the honors he has received, Gaughan said, "I enjoyed them at the time, but I found that when I began to get in front of people, I began to believe some of what they were saying. But I should be painting pictures instead of making jokes—I got so high on the crowd, it was hard to go back to my easel."

His non-science-fiction work has been exhibited at Phillips Academy and more recently was shown at the University of Dayton and the Cincinnati Art Academy. He's also had some science fiction covers shown at the Society of Illustrators in New York City. In addition, "I've had the distinct honor of having an article about me in the magazine *Dayton USA* written by none other than my good friend of long-standing, John Jakes—of whom you may have heard."

In illustrating the typical book, Gaughan reads the book and "searches out the science fiction images in the book—that which the reader could see on the stands and spot specifically as science fiction." If he can't find a specific science fiction image in the book, he resorts to a space ship or some other science fiction identifier.

Gaughan contends that an important aspect of illustrating a science fiction story is for the illustration to look like science fiction. If the story just involves two men talking across a desk, the desk, the wall, and the men's clothes should all indicate a future setting.

He paints on untempered Masonite cut to size and covered with several coats of gesso. This gives a good white ground and on that he proceeds "rather laboriously from the background up." He starts with the background, and in most of his paintings there is a complete landscape behind the characters.

After reading the book, he does several sketches which must be approved by the art director—who almost always picks the worst sketch, he laughed. Once, he had sketches due at Ace and Dell at the same time and his wife delivered the sketches. However, he had neglected to identify the sketches and Dell ended up approving the Ace sketch and Ace the Dell sketch.

He paints mainly in acrylics, he said, "because I'm sloppy." When using oil paints, the paint ends up in his eyes and nose, and when using watercolors, he can't fix his mistakes. He also likes acrylics because "I'm a rather fast worker even though I do a painting in laborious stages. I usually don't stop once I've

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started, but go all the way through."

As for illustrators who influenced him, Gaughan noted that when he lived with Hannes Bok he spent a good deal of time more or less as his apprentice. Bok was certainly an influence, but "although I've been accused all my life of being stylized, I never cared to be that stylized." In addition, he "spent the first years practically going blind trying to be Virgil Finlay" and is a great admirer of turn-of-the-century illustrators such as Howard Pyle and N.C. Wyeth.

These days, Gaughan is largely doing science fiction work—"enough to keep going, and recuperating from the disappointment of the failure of *Cosmos*." His science fiction work is currently mainly for Berkeley and DAW Books. In addition, he does a weekly political cartoon for a local weekly newspaper and some portrait work. He has also dabbled in writing, as evidenced by his short story in the November-December *Isaac Asimov's Science Fiction Magazine*.

His wife Phoebe "used to be a great cook" but is now being kept busy doing freelance work for needlework publishers such as Butterick. His son Brian, now 21, is just out of the Marines and is living in Phoenix, Arizona, "making cars go vroom." Daughter Norah, a senior in high school, won the Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute Science Award for juniors last year and wants to combine music and physics in her college career.

Gaughan concluded, "My own learnings in art, I have come to realize, are to the appreciation of a joyous or angry or contemplative slash at a panel or canvas rather than to painfully meticulous labor. I suppose if that needs a name, it's expressionism."

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FIRST SOLUTION TO THE THREE ROBOTS OF PROFESSOR TINKER
(from page 40)

Let *T* stand for the truther, *L* for liar, and *S* for sometimer. There are six possible permutations:

	Left	Middle	Right
1.	T	L	S
2.	T	S	L
3.	L	T	S
4.	L	S	T
5.	S	T	L
6.	S	L	T

Go over the questions and answers, applying them to each of the six cases. Only the sixth case does not produce a contradiction. Therefore the left robot is the sometimer, the middle robot is the liar, and the right robot is the truther.

Professor Tinker congratulated the student on his solution. For a second test he asked the three ladies to leave the room, then return and seat themselves again, though not necessarily in the same order. This time one of the girls was wearing an emerald necklace.

"Each robot was made on a different day," said Professor Tinker. "Therefore one of them is older than the others. All three know who she is. Your problem is to ask just *two* questions that will tell you whether the girl with the necklace is or isn't the oldest."

There was a long period of silence during which the students scribbled furiously on their notepads. Then Azik Isomorph, the brightest student in the class, raised his hand. How did Isomorph solve the problem? Turn to page 77 for an answer.

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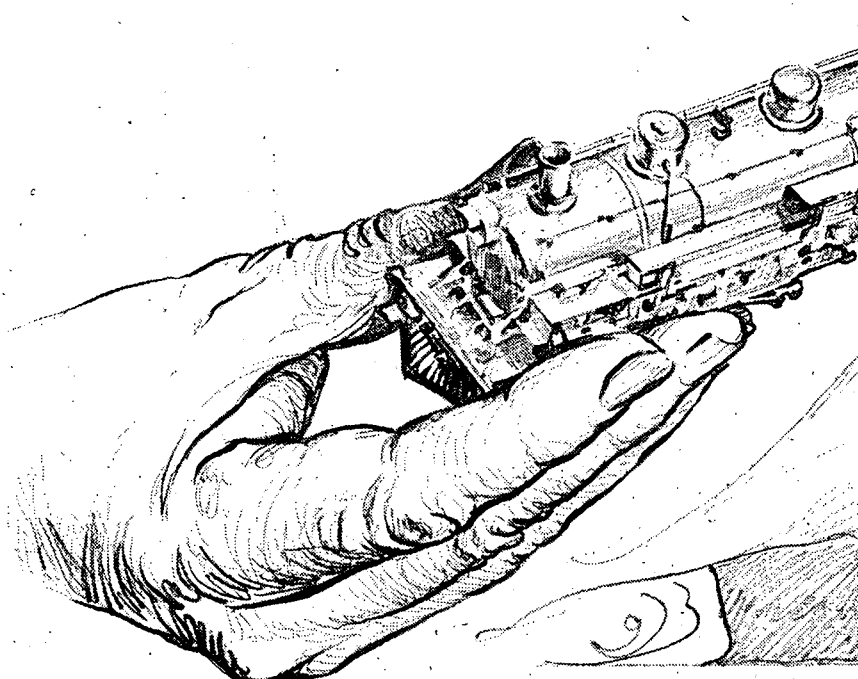
DOUBLE IN BRASS

by John M. Ford

art: Frank Kelly Freas

This has been a devil of a job to get into print, first with your editor scrambling to get photos of the proper model narrow-gauge locomotive (and finally finding the right one in Troxel Brothers', in Los Angeles), then with the artist (an editor in his own right, of the Starblaze Editions of illustrated SF trade paperbacks) trying to take enough time from his busy schedule to do these illustrations. We hope you enjoy the result.



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There are levels of the Pentagon where daylight never penetrates. Dust lies thick, dust that a thousand passes of a Von Schrader floor deterger have failed to dislodge. Signboards from a time before lowercase-boldface-supergraphics direct the unwary to rooms whose numbers appear on no secretary's Rolodex nor GPO pocket guide.

Jeremy Barrister and the General drove through one such cavern of linoleum and enamel, rolling on the silent tires of an electric golf cart. Ahead and behind, one fluorescent light in ten was lit; they glided between islands of brilliance in an endless channel of blackness. From behind the glass panels of some of the numbered and numberless doors came the green glow of EXIT signs and the whiter gleam of Tensor lamps. There was an occasional muffled gasp of passion, not everyone in Washington having learned his lesson. And some portals were guarded by shadow-Marines in navy and brass, white gloves tight and moveless behind their backs.

Jeremy was Field Operator [CLASSIFIED] of [CLASSIFIED] such operators for the Department of Esoteric Under Cover Evaluation. He was hard and lean, going on soft and easy, with ice-blue contact lenses, wavy dark hair, and a mysterious bulge under his custom-tailored jacket. He reached for the hard metal shape hanging there and wondered if he had any lighter fluid left. Then he looked across at the General and found a more pressing question.

The General was broad-set, rumpled-looking, with sandy hair and those wire-framed glasses the military had become so fond of. He had never actually (as was rumored) ordered a ration D-bar shot for breaking the tooth of a superior officer. He had in fact drawn his pearl-handled Colt and smashed the offending foodstuff to fragments on the hood of his Jeep. The rest of the story—well, the General looked like a man who would court-martial his lunch before executing it.

Jeremy sat back. He had been summoned from a cocktail party in Georgetown by two sergeants with guns and dark glasses. He seemed to recall a proposal on the desk of Cranner Macklin, the Department's ExDir, for a procedure like this; he tried to remember its title.

Oh, yes. An Amontillado Directive.

The golf cart clicked to a stop before a double steel door. The General vaulted out and inserted a plastic card in a slot by the door. A lamp blinked green, and a motor began grinding. Light spilled out, and Jeremy had to shield his eyes.

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When they cleared, he saw a half-dozen men in white coats and plastic photo badges striped with magnetic tape. Jeremy had a badge like that; there were areas in his office building in Langley where if you weren't wearing it, somebody just shot you, no questions asked.

Behind the men in white were stacks of electronic equipment, flickering screens, sleek cabinets, open copper breadboards; and beyond those . . .

Jeremy beheld a thousand square feet of Colorado landscape in miniature. Mountains of blue and copper-ore red, capped with plaster snow, milled-pine mining towns, cast-resin millponds and rivers and rushing cataracts, all threaded with puffing, clicking model trains on literal miles of nickel-silver HO track.

The Pentagon Pike was a rumor at Langley, but no more. It was said that an Army Corps of Engineers general had laid out its physical geology, that the prime contractor for the Mars Rover had built the control circuits, that FBI model experts took up permanent residence there and were reported killed in the line of duty.

The General snapped his fingers. "This is Jeremy from Langley," he said, despite the fact that everyone in the room was cleared TOP SECRET or higher. "Show him the first exhibit."

A whitecoat hustled to a workbench, returned with a gray-striped cardboard box. He caught Jeremy's eyes with his own watery blue ones and plucked off the box lid like a chef unveiling a birthday cake.

Inside, cushioned on gray plastic foam, lay a miniature steam locomotive of bright yellow brass. It looked fearfully delicate, built of fine wire piping and thin metal plates with rivet detail almost too small to see. Jeremy put a finger on one of the tiny pipe valves. The tech flinched, but Jeremy pressed anyway. The valve turned. Jeremy picked up the loco—carefully—and examined the cab and boiler backhead. There was a *lot* of detail. The cab controls moved smoothly, and some of them apparently were connected to further linkages. There was a peculiar deep darkness in the firebox.

"Does this run? I don't see a motor or gears."

The General bit the end violently from a cigar. "Very good. Right question. Next exhibit."

For the next two hours they watched brass locomotives inch over trestles, past towns, across plaster snowfields. When Jeremy looked closely, he could see the entire monkey-motion of the rod

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and valve gear churning and sliding. A red glow spilled from the firebox, licking like live flame. And at no time was a DC motor visible, nor drive gears, nor any other betraying detail.

"It's too good, isn't it?"

The General shook his head and walked away. He took up a position at a distant control panel and lost himself in switching a twenty-car mixed freight.

The blue-eyed whitecoat, a grey and sallow man with an ID number in the low twenties, cracked his knuckles and spoke. "It is not, of course, that there is anything there we can't *do*; oh, no. The valve gear, the castings, all just careful engineering; the Japanese do almost as well, and cheap labor there keeps the price down to about four hundred. Firebox glow is a thirty-cent grain-of-wheat bulb; the flicker and the sound, IC interrupter and synthesizer circuits. You can buy the sound generator in a box, now, for fifty dollars."

"Hey, Wally," the General called, "bend the iron down there, will you?"

The whitecoat bent over the benchwork and threw a track switch. He made a hand signal as the General's train rattled past.

"Here's the problem, you see, this here," and he picked up the gray box. An orange label was glued to one side, and on it, in smudged black printing, was:

Denver and Rio Grande Western K-36
HOn3 Narrow Gauge Locomotive
All Brass—Powered—Super Detailed
Price $99.95

"I believe you said *four hundred*?"

"Oh, yes. Or five. And for Korean labor."

"This is American-made?"

Wally rotated the gray box. The other end was clearly labeled:

Mal's Model Works
West Corydon, Indiana

There was a border of stars around the words.

"Very interesting," Jeremy said to the returning General. "But economic-controls sanctions are . . . ah . . . frowned upon in domestic areas. Last time I looked, Indiana was one of ours."

"Thought that about Massachusetts, too, didn't you? Till

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seventy-two, anyway." The General seemed much more relaxed now that he had sorted his train. "Show him Exhibit Three."

They brought out another gray box. Its orange sticker read:

Jet-Draft Model I
Complimentary Sample
Not To Be Sold

Inside was a tube of brass about six inches long, set with minute piping and valves, rings with turbine blades and others wrapped with fine wire. At one end was a ribbed exhaust bell, set free-swiveling on gimbals.

"It looks like a jet engine."

"You're warm. It's a magnetohydrodynamic propulsion unit. An MHD jet engine, if you prefer. And it's not one of ours." The General unfolded a diazo print, stamped TOP SECRET/EYES ONLY/BURN FIRST, showing the engine installed in a . . .

"Oh, my God. The Fourflush."

The General nodded, very grimly.

When observation plane U-464, codenamed "Snookums," had reported sighting a formation of "unidentified disc-shaped aircraft" over the Kamchatka peninsula, the proper office had been contacted. The proper office had given the proper reply:

"See if your pilot was drinking, it was crud on his windshield and a cloud formation of swamp gas, and a lot of nice people lost their jobs over Blue Book so don't use Autovon for this again, happy to be of service and good day, sir."

Snookums never reported another such sighting. But Snowbird did, and Starfire and Stonewall, and SARCOR, which being a satellite never drank anything stronger than IR from gas-well fires. There were soon photographs and radar records, and not enough doubt left to matter: *They* had a flying saucer. The Bureau In Charge of Their Aircraft coded it as the "Fourflush," and could barely wait until May Day to get pictures of one being towed through Red Square, or maybe even being flown upside down and backwards over the Kremlin. Weapons experts tend to a morbid interest in what They have that We don't.

"Where'd you get this?"

"It was mailed to a physics professor at Caltech."

"Intercept?"

"Personal loan. He's a friend."

"So somebody is producing brass models of the most classified

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aircraft in the world."

"Not . . . exactly." The General fished in his shirt pocket. "Let me have one of your cigars."

"Sorry, these are all . . . you know."

"Yeah, I know. You and your damned gadgets. Why don't you people carry guns like everyone else? Wally, get me those cigars out of the back. The cheap ones."

The tech came back with a box bearing a particularly unexceptional brand name. The General selected one, pointedly failing to sniff the leaf aroma. "Understand: we keep these for demonstration purposes only. Now watch."

He took the little engine, held it loosely and thumbed a projection on the side. The miniature turbine wheels spun up with a soft, high whine. He held the cigar's pointed end to the turbine vanes.

Jeremy elevated an eyebrow.

The General reversed the cigar and inserted its flat end into the jet exhaust. He fingered another of the tiny valves, and a bright blue light flashed in the exhaust bell.

"Nicely done."

"That's not all. Watch it. Don't puff it, just watch."

The cigar burned slowly, evenly. "So?" said someone in a dark blue suit and an engineer's cap. "Any good cigar burns well." Someone showed him the cigar box and he fell instantly silent.

Jeremy felt sweat forming on his forehead. Unable to bear it any longer, he grabbed the cigar and took an experimental draw, expecting to taste kerosene or some such combustible adulterant. But there was only the taste of a—surprisingly good—cigar.

"Very clever trick. How's it done?"

"Generally how, there's some kind of forced aeration of the tobacco. Tilt the bell and you can light your pipe, but Wally says a pipe you don't have to fiddle with is no fun. And the oxygenation seems to help the taste.

"*Just* how, we don't know. In fact, they're not sure whether this is a lighter that happens to look like an MHD fan or an MHD fan that happens to light cigars."

"Can't we build a comparison model?"

There was a distinct silence. "More or less," Wally muttered.

The General put the brass object back into the box. "I want the Department to find out where this damned thing came from. It sure wasn't *Indiana*. Find out how it got packaged as a lighter, of all things. And find out how they make 'em so damned

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cheap . . . wonder how a brass 88-millimeter gun made that fine would shoot . . . .

"And get out of here. This is my train night."

Jeremy's little blue Triumph roared northwest on the George Washington Parkway. The big green sign for the Bureau of Public Roads' Fairbank Center flashed past; he downshifted and moved into the right lane, but passed the exit. As everyone knew, the Fairbank exit led to the CIA's headquarters.

Jeremy turned off at the next exit, the one marked "Central Intelligence Agency." It opened onto a pleasant road that wound through deep autumn forests. Every hundred yards a square metal plate was set into the road surface. From time to time people could be seen moving silently through the woods, carrying binoculars, radios, and long thin objects sheathed in cloth.

The holes in the road were empty; in 1967 the Department for Esoteric Under Cover Evaluation had traded the plastique cratering charges for a complete table service for thirty from the CIA's Executive Dining Room. In 1971 they had begun lending binoculars, walkie-talkies, and camera tripods to naturalists who used the woods for birdwatching.

The six-foot fence gates were open; Clyde, the gate guard, looked up from his *Rolling Stone* just long enough to wave Jeremy through. He turned tight and parked between the Executive Director's Volkswagen and the Senior Budget Comptroller's Tiffany Lincoln.

Department Headquarters was a futuristic, spacious Mies van der Rohe copy in glass, dark woods, and unfinished concrete. There was a Main Entrance, a Service Entrance, a Clandestine Operator's Entrance, a helipad on the roof, a drive-through Emergency Drop, and an underground tunnel from the back of a diner in Langley.

Jeremy took the Main Entrance, as did most of the Field Operators. The Clandestine door involved searches, electronic scans, and mouth-misting, a procedure designed to inactivate hollow-tooth transmitters that was supposed to taste like peppermint candy but came off more like a rinse with brine and cleaning fluid.

Going through the Main door, on the other hand, entailed passing Clarinda.

Her voice was honey on the telephone or the briefing tape, and her figure was, if not spectacular, entirely adequate. Whatever the

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day, whatever the hour, she was sitting in the center of the big domed reception room, in the circle formed by her onyx desk, IBM typewriter/minicomputer, and Sperry Location Security console. The effect was rather as if a think tank had bought into the Pirelli calendar.

And then, of course, you met her.

A manner like a coiled cobra. Words that could hole steel armor at line-of-sight distances. A look that curdled human blood. Clarinda in person seemed to have been transplanted, *virago intacta,* from the darkest, most paranoid moments of World War II. The other side.

"*Well,* if it isn't *Mis*ter Jeremy, the James Bond of the Tinkertoy set! Where's the *badge,* dear?"

He fumbled the plastic card to her, and she ran it through the coder as if she were Minos consigning a soul to its place in Hell.

"*Mis*ter *Mack*lin wants to see you, God knows why. And I *heard* about your midnight dalliance at the Pentagon—*out of your league,* darling Jeremy."

He pricked his finger putting the badge on. He saw the Executive Director wave, from safe inside the chromium booth of his private elevator. Not that he was hiding. Cranner Macklin was the only person in the world totally unfazed by Clarinda, and why not? Other intelligence agencies had scanners and sniffers and electric fences, machine guns on the roof and cameras in the executive washroom, zillions of zlotys spent snooping on themselves, and to what effect? They were every one burdened, *plagued,* with doubles and defectors and field agents who quit to write their memoirs.

Cranner Macklin had a GS-21 named Clarinda, before whom no infiltrator could keep his mask up, no double double-dipped in thiopent and hypnarcosis could keep his truths straight, let alone his lies. A Clandestine Operator had gone in search of the hardcover houses one day, and Macklin let slip the tongue of Clarinda in the proper fields. The poor fellow was released by his literary agent and advised to take up writing cookbooks. No Russian cooking, please.

The elevator doors closed with an audible sigh. Macklin waved a crisp gray sleeve and caught a lit cigarette from the air. Three more appeared in his hand, all different. Jeremy took the one closest to his brand, and the ExDir vanished the rest with a flourish.

"Cranner, do we have taps in . . . "

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"Oh, you know. I had Clarinda go through the morning GRBS and ConComInt reports. But I'd like to hear it from you. —One moment." He reached for the elevator controls and depressed RECORD. Jeremy told the story to Macklin and a holotape. Both declined comment.

They got out on the Equipments sublevel. Smoking was forbidden; Jeremy tossed the stub of his cigarette into a container, Macklin put his between finger and thumb and vanished it.

He was really very good at that sort of thing.

The level had a perpetual smell of powder smoke and napalm. Gunshots rang in the halls, and occasionally a squad of trainees with charcoaled faces burst into the cafeteria and machine-gunned everyone with blanks. Macklin walked with Jeremy to Primary Injection, spoke a few furtive words, waved, and disappeared into the private dining room. Behind a door, that is; he had once gone up in a puff of sulfurous smoke, but Maintenance had complained.

Primary Equipments issued Jeremy a traveling bag with three suits and a gasoline credit card, and sent him on to the Mission Controller. The MisCon was always wearing green coveralls, a garrison belt, paratrooper boots and a black beret; he made it known that he carried two pistols, three knives, and a poisoned hatpin at all times. He was quite proud of the fact that he never clanked when he walked.

"You'll need a code name. Let's run it through the files." The MisCon was grinning like . . . well, grinning, as he typed keywords into the naming program.

"How's 'Tycho' sound?"

"Uh . . . fine." The MisCon had written the naming program, and it was usually wise not to press the question with it or him.

"Will you want video contact?"

Jeremy visualized himself with a TV camera on his shoulder. "Audio only, I think."

"Fine. We'll clear you a channel and an MCM soonest. Hardware?"

"This *is* a domestic operation."

"No antitank or long arms, then. Pistol?"

"Got one in the car."

"Check it, hmmm? The DDT has some explosive nine-millimeter they're trying to get rid of."

Jeremy studied the Department of Dirty Tricks' shelflist. "Let me have a box of assorted CXD's . . . an L88 with charges . . . oh,

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and have them refill the oil sprayers on the Triumph."

"Oil—my, you *have* been off assignment, I see."

The mechanic working on Jeremy's car spoke wistfully of changing times and customs as he replaced the oil cylinders under the Triumph's rear bumper with a box-and-valve arrangement.

"Silicone suspension," he said, tightening a solenoid valve. "Ain't half enough oil to *lube* the cars anymore, let alone make 'em slip. I put in my requisition for twenty barrels of hazard oil, and you should'a heard the little twerp from DOE came down to bawl me out. Nobody cares about engineering no more.

"Now you take those hovercraft tanks the Army's foolin' with. The XHM-Ones down at Fort Knox. Know how you make *them* slide around?"

It had been included in Jeremy's last Vehicular Demolitions briefing, but he asked the polite question.

"*Goo* and fiberglass *powder,* that's how! Y'spray it around, and it *gums up their lift fans,* f'r golsake. Can you beat that? Hellfire, I can remember the old days, slewin' round the Russky oil on them tight little Ostdeutsch roads. . . ."

He filled the car's gas tank and gave it a friendly pat. "Great little machine, a Triumph. I remember one night on the refugee scientist run out of Dresden—I was holdin' the wheel like it was a woman and shiftin' from first into fifth and back again without stoppin' in between. My partner was a little Belgian fella, and he was kneelin' on the seat firin' a Thompson into the big black Volga sedan behind us—we crashed the gates doin' one-forty, and damned if we didn't have to pry our little cargo out of the trunk with a jack handle and a bottle of *appelwoi. . .*"

Jeremy was sure it was only his imagination, but as Clyde waved him out, it seemed that the little blue car throbbed and tried on its own to burst through the fence.

Southern Indiana in October blew wet red-gold leaves around the wheels of the Triumph. The light was patchy through broken dark clouds, the angled sunrays strongly visible in dusty but uncongested air.

Jeremy's Injection Briefing had been thankfully short, mostly concerned with weather and the locals. It was decided that any major cultural errors Jeremy might make would be explained by his cover. The MisCon had argued firmly, nonetheless, that agents died or worse all the time for improper cultural tactics. In

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the end, they had settled on a Basic Background packet; and now Jeremy watched it come to life.

West Corydon was a town of frame houses on tree-lined streets, one police car, parked now in front of the only restaurant, and a modest limestone courthouse with a green copper dome. The shell of a vintage Sherman tank was mounted, ever vigilant, on the lawn.

Rain clouds were gathering in a yellow evening sky as Jeremy pulled to a curb. He reached under the dashboard, checked his Walther P1 in its Philip Marlowe clamps. The brown Norfolk jacket he wore had an invisibly tailored gun loop just above the bulge of his lighter, but he decided against carrying for what was supposedly a reconnaisance mission. The L88, already charged, was in his shirt pocket; he opened the glove compartment and took a handful of spare cartridges. The box of CXD "cigars" was under the seat. Several 220s went into his jacket pockets, plus a 224, a 226, and a pair of metal-cased 227s.

Jeremy bent down to inspect his front tires. There had been an Amishman on the road ahead of him, and sharp curves and open-throttled semis had kept him from passing the buggy on the narrow state road. It had brought back a distant, chilling memory of the other time he'd been caught behind a horse, on a Rumanian gravel path, during the affair of the export copying machines, the ones with concealed microfilm cameras. *We all have our paranoias,* he reflected, and patted the bulges in his jacket.

He touched a finger to his lapel, and a voice crackled in his ear.

"Reading test five-by-five, Tycho," the Mission Communications Monitor said from his console in Langley.

"Location," Jeremy said.

"Two blocks ahead and on your right. According to Defense, anyway."

He met a few people on the street, smiled. Most of them smiled back. The Background packet said that smiling was an acceptable cultural contact between strangers, gestures being generally reserved for recognized friends, and body contacts (compiler's note—handshakes only for men) for business relationships.

There were two buildings at the address in question. One was a fifty-by-ninety steel prefab in fresh tan paint, a four-color illuminated sign declaring it to be Mal's Model Works. The other structure looked like a small frame house that an earthmover had broadsided several times. Its battered wooden signboard argued that it, too, was Mal's Model Works.

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Jeremy had been in this business for a long time. He went without hesitation to the worn old building, thinking suddenly that these people knew the signals too, and maybe the Injection Briefing should have been a little more comprehensive.

A card by the doorbell read:

Mal's Model Works
Malcolm Hindemith, Prop.
No Solicitors
No Enquiries
No Visitors
Press Bell

"Homebrew," he muttered into his lapel, "did that phone call go through?"

"That's a roger, Tycho. Subject expressed extreme interest when the option hit seven figures."

Jeremy pressed the bell. A man in a checked shirt, jeans, and sneakers opened the door, and Jeremy was off the blocks and running.

"Jeremy Bernstein, sir, Douglas Toy Imports; you received our call, I believe?" He produced the palmed card, put out a hand (business deals, the Briefing said), and got his wingtip shoe firmly in the doorframe. He was wearing steel-shanked Salesman's Oxfords, just in case.

"Bernstein, of course, of course. The six million dollar man. I'm Mal Hindemith, I run this dog and pony show. C'mon in, there's coffee."

Hindemith's office was like a hobby shop hit by a hurricane. Plastic and metal trees of model parts were piled on drafting tables, blueprints and elevations tacked to the walls and the edges of shelves. Some of the shelves were busy switchyards, some harbors, some airfields. Hung from the ceiling on invisible filaments, a Messerschmitt-109 dove out of the ceiling lights on a Supermarine Spitfire. Above the rosewood rolltop of Hindemith's massive, paper-clogged desk was a nineteen-thirties crack passenger train, light winking from the brass rail of the observation car.

Hindemith poured coffee. He was generously plump, and his bald head shone in the room light. His hands and feet were huge, his grin broad. *God help me,* Jeremy thought, *his eyes are twinkling.* He had the feeling Hindemith's eyes were dismantling him, like a fine watch—or a complicated brass model.

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"So, Jerry, you'd like a crack at the Jet-Draft. Well, I'll be honest with you, I'll tell you straight. You're not the only one."

"We're prepared to bargain."

"Six million *bucks*, over the *phone*, I guess you *are*."

There was a noise like a distant train whistle.

"The doorbell. Back in a moment, have more coffee if you like."

Hindemith left the office. Jeremy sprang into action. Minox camera in hand, he began snapping pictures of everything that looked worthwhile.

His eye fell on a stack of boxes in the corner. They were large flat squares, the familiar gray stripe. Rubber-stamped in red on the topmost box was the word EXPORT. There were no orange stickers; instead the box end was printed directly.

The printing was not English. Jeremy scanned it; he read Russian, Arabic, Hebrew, Cherokee, and a smattering of college Cuneiform.

The label was not any of these.

Jeremy briefly wished he'd asked for a creepie-peepie camera. If Langley's linguists couldn't read something, nobody wanted to know it. He took a Minox shot, listened for sounds of Hindemith's return, and popped the box lid.

The model inside did not rest on gray foam, but on several liquid-filled cushions. It was not a Denver and Rio Grande locomotive, nor an Me-109.

Jeremy tapped his lapel. "Patch through to Big D."

The MCM at Langley acknowledged, and Jeremy heard the clicks and hums of Autovon, the Pentagon's phone company. It was not always fast, and its errors were Pentagonic in scope, but Jeremy could well understand the desire to have your very own phone company.

The General came on, sounding as though he had a cigar in his mouth, or maybe two. "That you, Barrister?"

"Codename, Tycho, please," the MCM shouted, hurting Jeremy's ear.

"General, I've found a stack of Fourflush models, intact—"

"Codename, Big D—"

"*I want those*! Get the source, find out what in Hell is going on out there, but get me those airplanes!"

"Profanity on frequency—"

"We're going to be negotiating," Jeremy said. "I don't know—six million didn't seem to impress him that much."

"Discussion of classified operations—" Langley whined.

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"*Double it.* Do you know how much *one* of those Blackbirds costs to run? Nearly—"

The MCM let out a sob.

"Think Hindemith's coming back. Homebrew, lock channel open, please, and record."

Jeremy closed the box, replaced everything and was back in his chair with a cup of coffee when Hindemith returned.

Another man came behind him. The newcomer was tall and thin, wearing a coarse brown suit that looked ill-fitted, neither too short nor too long but somehow wrong anyway. He had on the first plain white shirt and narrow dark tie that Jeremy had seen in years. He dabbed at a high, pale forehead with a handkerchief held in long bony fingers. The thin man seemed so terribly overheated Jeremy looked out the window to be sure it was still October.

"Jerry Bernstein, this is Al Ruskin. You guys are in the same line of work."

"Toys?" Ruskin said, sounding hopeful.

"Toys."

"Buying my stuff," Hindemith said. "Mr. Ruskin, here, he's from—Jerry, you're from New York, aren't you?"

"We have branches in Chicago, Miami, Denver, and Los Angeles."

"I am from Vancouver," Ruskin said quickly.

"No, he's not," the MCM whispered. "We've got a linguist on the line, Tycho, says he's an accent-erasure. We could tell where from if you could put the mike . . . six inches from his throat."

Jeremy choked on his coffee.

"Careful," Hindemith said. "Anyway, I'm glad you both dropped by. Al, Jerry here has offered me a very sweet deal for my entire production of Jet-Drafts."

"My request was prior."

"Oh, yeah, Al, I know, good faith is good faith, but we *do* operate in a free-enterprise economy, y'know? I was hoping, see, that you guys could reach some kind of agreement between yourselves."

"I was empowered . . . to deal only . . . for the full production. And all future production."

"He's a goddamn Russian," the General rasped long-distance. "Free-enterprise, whole production—sounds to me like he's trying to work out payment for his little breach of security."

"The linguist," Langley put in, "says he can work with nine

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inches of mike separation."

"Well," Jeremy said smoothly, "I believe my employers were less interested in a purchase of finished products than in taking over production."

The General said, "What?"

Ruskin began coughing.

"Big D," the MCM at Langley said hurriedly, "'take over production' is dualcode for 'eliminate the opposition'."

Hindemith grinned again, and his eyes flashed. "Well, in that case, you gentlemen could simply deal with each other, and I could get back to building models."

Deal with each other, Jeremy thought. In dualcode that meant *shoot it out.* As the MCM warned him about recordings on open Department channels, Jeremy reached for the bulge inside his coat, carefully watching the other two men. Hindemith was still smiling like . . . yeah, like that. Ruskin was over his coughing fit; he appeared uncomprehending, sort of alien.

Alien?

Jeremy's hand emerged with a thin panatela claro and a gold lighter. "Let me," Hindemith said without missing a beat, and produced a Jet-Draft from a desk drawer. Ruskin began mopping his forehead again.

"Let's see if I get your drift, Mr. Hindemith."

"Mal."

"*Right.* Now, as I see it, you're willing to let my firm take full control of Jet-Draft manufacturing; you'd leave the business entirely."

Take control: substitute our agents for yours.

"I run a model shop, Jerry. Models are what I want to make. I've got a run of bee-yoo-ti-ful Pacific Coast Shays that I've had to shelve for six months because an . . . outside design outfit insisted I build those gadgets to a deadline. Now mind you, it's a great doohickey, keeps your pipe lit so long my banker won't use one, but it's just *not* a brass locomotive, y'know?"

Yeah, I know, Jeremy thought. *Get this little coup over, then on to the next project. Mister, you're either blind stupid or the coolest operator since Philby.* "And you, Mr. Ruskin, would you agree to buy production from us?"

The General's voice was barely controlled. "Barrister . . . what you are proposing is an arms deal with *not only* a foreign power, but *the*—"

Ruskin coughed. "This is not covered in my instructions."

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Right, opposite number mine. It's not in the book to let the other guys get a piece of the action. "Oh, I don't think the hurry is very great. In fact, before we close up anything tight, I'd like to look over Mr. Hindemith's facilities here."

Hindemith nodded vigorously. "Sure thing: You, Al?"

Ruskin stood up. "I do not—that is—I do not have a great deal of time."

Jeremy smiled. That was one of the things you could count on with Them; they had to code and send to base before changing their socks. "Well, when you gotta go, and all. Shake on it, for now? And a cigar for good faith." He waved a hand and produced a silver humidor tube, in best Cranner Macklin style.

"I do not . . . smoke . . . the air . . . but if it is customary. . ." Ruskin took the cigar, fingering his collar with his other hand. He did not offer to shake.

Jeremy put a hand on his own lapel. The MCM yelped.

"I hope, Barrister," the General growled, "that your motives are better than they look."

"Hang on to that cigar, Ruskin. It's a pre-Castro Havana, fine broad leaf."

"That's a roger, Tycho, we are locking onto homing signal from your CXD-227 unit, ready to split track and follow." The MCM's voice was much relieved. This was the kind of thing he understood.

"Hard to find," Hindemith put in. "Got another?"

"Not as hard as you might think." He gave Hindemith an unmodified 220. They smoked much better. "You're sure, Mr. Ruskin, you can't stay? The factory tour sounds interesting."

"Thank you, no. I must make some . . . phone . . . calls. I was empowered to deal for products. . . . Good day." He bowed stiffly. The door banged behind him.

"Doesn't concern him much, does it? What's his company use, slave labor?" Jeremy felt he might have pushed the dualcode a bit far.

"I don't think the union arrangements are the same for him."

They went through an off-hung wooden door, down a short, dusty corridor, and emerged inside the big steel building. Inside were a dozen machines, wildly oscillating assemblies of levers and belts and wheels. Jeremy saw heavy cables, and tubing thick with frost that led from Dewar flasks labeled LIQUID NITROGEN. On each contraption was a CAUTION LASER starburst. The room was full of crackling and whirring noises, and the smells of strong acid and

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ozone and hot brass.

The machines were running apparently untended. Along one wall a half-dozen people were putting finished brass models into gray-striped boxes and applying orange labels. At the far end of the wall bench a middle-aged woman was packing filled boxes in cardboard cartons; another was sealing and labeling the cartons. Finally a hefty young man piled the crates on a hand truck and wheeled them outside.

Hindemith handed Jeremy a pair of laser goggles and a bump cap marked VISITING FIREMAN. They walked over to one of the machines. From a distance, it had looked like a war among several praying mantises, or a multiple helicopter crash. Up close it was even harder to describe.

"The original idea was my brother Bill's," Hindemith said. He patted the gyrating thing fondly, then jerked his hand back as the cyan beam of a laser buzzed near.

"Bill works for the Mint, in Philadelphia, y'know? He's an electrochemist, makes these big electroplated masters for coin dies. See, the coin engravers start out carving a thing about a foot across, and they plate that. Then they clamp the electro to a thing called a Janvier machine, a cutting pantograph; and it traces the electro and cuts a die the size of the coin.

"Anyway, Bill said, 'Why don't you cut parts that way?' and the more thought I gave it, the more sense it made.

"And the more things I thought of. Milling tools wear out, but have you ever seen the life specs on one of these lasers? And the power costs less, now, than all that cooling oil would have. Bill taught me about chemical milling. And I'm looking over an ultrasonic set-up.

"Then my boy Tom—that's him on the end, there—he got laid off from his first job because a microcomputer with tin hands learned how to do it. Tom was kind of left-headed back then, if you know what I mean, and he took a correspondence course on assembly robots so he could go back and, I believe the term is, trash them. Well, I had my lawyer talk to him in private, clever man, and when Tom came out he told me, 'Dad, I think the real answer is to turn the system against itself.' "

"Do you mean that . . . this . . . *does all the work*?"

Hindemith spread his hands. "What do you mean by 'all of it?' Something like a loco, the machine does subassemblies that we have to finish by hand. And it takes about two months to cut all the program tapes, because GE put Izzy Goldman and Fred Smith

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out to pasture two years ago, and they hate having their retirement time cut in on. Golden years, and all that."

"What . . . do they program from?"

"That's the great part. All we need is drawings. Izzy and Fred use an optical scanner they designed—and patented, and you can guess how much GE knows about it—and it cuts the control tape. They built a decoder for it that lets 'em use isometric drawings, like explodeds. They can even use perspective art, like photographs, but the decoding gets fussy. We had a drover's caboose once that looked like a short-legged mountain sheep—only level on the side of a hill."

Hindemith waved to one of the women, who on a closer look wore her middle age far better than Jeremy had thought.

"Charlotte, we'll have an extra for dinner tonight. This is Jerry Bernstein from—New York, right?"

"Now, Mal, you know you and Tom have to go meet that, er, air freight tonight."

There was a sudden ruckus in Jeremy's ear. The General was yelling something unintelligible and distant; he seemed to have thrown down his telephone. There were diminishing stomping noises.

"Tycho, acknowledge," the MCM was pleading. "Click your teeth, or something."

Jeremy clicked his teeth and kissed Charlotte Hindemith's hand.

The dinner was excellent, and uneventful. Between his Briefing and a toy-industry expert that the MCM put on line, Jeremy managed the conversation very well. He did not find out what "outside design outfit" had provided the Fourflush drawings.

It began raining about an hour after dark. Jeremy excused himself to put the top up on his Triumph. He got inside the closed car and spoke aloud.

"What happened to Big D?"

"Tycho, Big D is en route to your position."

"Explain."

"No can do, Tycho; this is Department open channel."

Jeremy sighed. "What's his ETA? Did he leave any message?"

"Last message quote: 'Tell Bar—ah, Tycho to find their delivery truck and bug it. We're going to by-God inter—ah, Tycho, I can't read this . . . . He then left to procure a plane to your area; estimated arrival one hour thirty-seven minutes from now."

"Where are we supposed to meet?"

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"You have a reservation as Bernstein at the Holiday Inn seven miles south."

"How long will they hold it?"

"All month if you want. We tapped into the reservation computer directly."

Jeremy closed the mike and said, "Thank you, Cranner, I love you too."

On the way back to the Hindemiths', he circled around the big metal building. A Chevy van was parked in back: it was the ubiquitous gray, with orange-and-black signs. There were no windows in the back, and the door was locked. Jeremy took out the other CXD-227, gave the end cap a twist, and stuck it magnetically behind the front bumper.

"Receiving second signal," the voice from Langley said.

When he got back to the house, Hindemith and his son were in raincoats and boots. "Sorry to kick you out, Jerry, but we've got an air freight schedule to live by, and a bit of a drive."

"Oh, I understand," Jeremy replied, making a mental note to check the range on the 227.

He drove to the motel, checked in, and sat down to wait.

After two hours he called Langley.

"No data, Tycho, except that the plane in question was not repeat not routed to your position."

"What?"

"That's all, sir."

At 2:10 AM the General arrived. Beneath a very wet black poncho he was wearing battle dress.

"All right, Barrister, this intercept is under way. There's a Jeep waiting outside; grab your gear. Got a sidearm?"

Jeremy yawned, rubbed his eyes. "In the car—*wait* a minute. Intercept? *Gun*? Are you *serious?*"

"No time for the car. Here." The General drew one of his pearl-handled Colts, checked the magazine and the chamber and flipped it into Jeremy's lap.

"I guess you're serious."

"I'm in *uniform,* damn it!"

The Jeep screeched around corners on the slick narrow blacktop. Wind and rain battered at the canvas canopy.

"Mister, that Russian agent is the only authorization I *need.* Under the provisions of the Logan Act, it is a federal offense for private citizens to deal with foreign governments, did you know that?"

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"It's one of Cranner Macklin's favorite enforcements."

They got out on the edge of a woods, thin with autumn but still deep and black. The rain was sheeting now, nearly vertical, and the ground was a bog of wet dead leaves and mud beneath.

"*All right, move it!*" the General shouted to the trees and the darkness.

A searchlight appeared at ground level like an opening eye, then two, then three. They seemed to rise from the soil itself. After the lights came turrets, low and angular, mounting short, broad gun-tubes. Up came the vehicle hulls, massive sharp things glossy and dark in the night and the rain. Lightning lit the whole area, and in a flash of whitened color the fan skirts were visible; then came a blast of sound and a rushing diesel roar.

Mouth half-open, eyes half-closed, Jeremy watched the scene, fragments of data falling together in his half-sleeping mind into a greater pattern like a jigsaw puzzle assembling itself.

Turrets, guns; they were tanks.

White stars on the sides; they were our tanks.

Fan skirts—*fan skirts?* They were our *hovercraft* tanks!

Jeremy took a step and sank to his ankle in muck. "General, what are those doing here?"

The General ignored Jeremy. A beatific smile on his face, he put out a hand to the XHM-1 armored hovercraft, like a wizard calming conjured dragons, like Moses watching the water part.

"Three tanks to stop a Chevy van, General? Three *classified* tanks?"

"The Fourflush used to be classified too. I thought about that, Barrister; I wondered, now just what do the Russkies want bad enough to trade *that* little bit of business for?"

"But if Ruskin's a double agent—"

"If he was a walk-in double, he would have come to a professional intelligence agency, like *us*!"

Jeremy had no real answer for that. Quietly he followed the General aboard the lead tank.

"No, this is a trade. But what for? Something big, something classified. Blackbirds, I thought. No, if they wanted a Blackbird they'd shoot one down with that flying saucer. Submarines? We don't have any sub patrols in the Ohio River—I don't think. Tanks, boy, tanks! This XHM section's been testing down at Fort Knox. Motive and opportunity. Got a cigar, Barrister?"

Jeremy came up with one in the normal fashion. The General lit it from a Jet-Draft.

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"Ruskin's gonna get XHM's, all right. But they're gonna be too big to mail home to Moscow!" He tapped the driver's helmet. "Forward!"

Thunder cracked. The XHM-1's moved forward about fifty feet. Then, with a rending whine of lift fans and a spray of mud, the lead vehicle nosed down and was lost to sight.

Gradually, it crawled out of the sinkhole.

"I have driven tanks," the General said, cigar broken in his teeth, "through the Black Forest, through rice paddies in Korea and jungles in You-know-where, and across the eighth-hole rough at Fort Bragg. But I have *never* encountered such a God-forsaken piece of ground in my *life!* What *is* this, anyway?"

"Karst, sir," the driver said brightly. "Sinkholes as far as the eye can see. You know, sir, the geography of southern Indiana is virtually identical to that of Mars."

There was a brief, wet silence.

"The *planet* Mars?"

"Yes, sir."

"Can the geography lesson, soldier! Get this column *rolling*!"

They drove on, through the water and the wind. Lightning etched trees against white sheet sky, and the drum of rain on metal hulls was louder than the thunder. Mud blew from the fan skirts and slopped on the vehicles' flanks, magnetic bearings whined and sang, and the U.S. Army rose out of the mire and pressed on.

Inside the lead tank's hull, Jeremy felt warm and snug and quite uncomfortable. He leaned against a rack of antitank rockets and mused upon Al Ruskin.

The strange look in his eyes, his pale skin that sweated in October. His untraceable speech.

From *Vancouver,* for God's sake?

His unconcern with the biggest industrial development since steam engines.

"I . . . do not smoke . . . the air. . . ."

What air did he usually breathe?

Ground like the planet Mars and a Flying Saucer Connection. Boxes printed in a peculiar alphabet, marked EXPORT.

Export from where?

Why was it nobody in Intelligence could see a flying saucer until they thought they were a Russian invention?

The ground-radar operator turned around. "We're picking up the 227 signals very strongly now. Sir . . . sir, one of them appears

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to be airborne. Can't tell which."

"It's not likely to be the truck." The General chewed on a new cigar; it was wet but still burning valiantly. "How far are they?"

"About a kilometer, sir. Sir! I have a bogie on the scope near the airborne signal. Approaching fast!"

"What kind of—"

The cigar fell to the deck near Jeremy's feet. He stubbed it out quickly on the nose of a missile, found a hatch and threw it open. Electric-blue light spilled in with the weather. There was a deep thrumming sound.

Ahead and above was a glowing metal object, a squat cone hanging in the air.

"Holy blue heaven," the driver whispered, "a UFO."

"Hell, soldier, I'll identify it for you! That's the Army's first good look at a Russky Fourflush—damned if I know how they got it into the country, but they sure as Hell aren't taking it out again!"

Jeremy opened his mike. "Homebrew, this is Tycho. What's the diameter of a Fourflush fighter aircraft?"

"That data is—"

"*What in Hell is the diameter?*"

"Ah . . . Photogrammetry says twelve to eighteen meters gr—" The transmission cut off with a piercing squeal.

The ring in the sky spanned fully eighty meters rim to rim.

"Column disperse! Get in defilade!"

"Sir, you can't use the radio, we're in communications blackout."

"Damn, MHD does that, doesn't it."

"Not a scout craft," Jeremy mumbled. "Cargo vessel, maybe a superdreadnaught."

"We need a signal. The Very lights!"

Mechanically, Jeremy pulled out a CXD-224 and lit the end. "Casey Jones calling Dr. Zarkov," he said, and the upraised cigar fired a white star shell. The three hovercraft drifted toward the safety of sinkholes.

And then a cloud of something exploded around them, and one vehicle slewed right, sideswiping another. Jeremy saw globs of white particles, and ducked, and knew it was bad for the lungs to inhale fiberglass particles. He wondered what they were using for goo.

Blue light suffused the world.

And then suddenly Jeremy could see and hear and think again,

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and there was nothing in the air but rain. The General's XHM nosed out of its hole. The searchlight picked up a gray van with orange panels. Next to it was a small helicopter, its blades bent at crazy angles. It had impacted, not landed.

At the copter's controls they found Al Ruskin.

"I confess," he said dazedly as two soldiers lifted him from the seat. "Deal for Americansky flying-pie-pan airplane falls through, I fall through, lose Moscow apartment. Maybe you let me go home anyway, I can tell about big mother of all pie-pans . . . be very good for detente."

"*Our airplane?*" the General howled.

"Sure, we know you got it, no secret. *Krasnyoriels* take pictures all the time."

"General," Jeremy said gently, "our saucer, their saucer—no." He pointed at the sky. "*Their* saucer." He pointed at the van. "Well, as long as we're here, we might as well take delivery."

They slogged to the truck. Jeremy took out the L88, twisted its penpoint to Ignite, and blew the rear door apart. He lit a CXD-226; in its magnesium light they saw a pair of hip boots, a backpack broadcast-seeder, and one and only one gray-striped box. The box had a letter taped to it.

The General pried off the lid of the seeder and took a cautious sniff. "Damn," he said, "this isn't fiberglass." He turned to one of the damp and sniffling tankers, whispered in his ear. Aloud, he added, "Don't argue, soldier! Go check the fans on Number One."

Jeremy peered at the letter, which read:

Enclosed please find one (1) complimentary model from Kvek't'net Models' line of Fighting Vehicles of the Galaxy. The Gwildingnafthvorvel XI (*loose translation: Nictitating-Membraned Floater on the Winds of the Ambisexual God-ling*) has the latest modifications to avoid clogging of the lift fans with foreign substances.

The soldier came back, his arms covered to the elbows with lumpy brown stuff. "You were right, sir," he said in a small voice. "It's oatmeal."

Please do not order further models in this series through us, as we are solely a manufacturing center for Kvek't'net Models, who maintain their own distribution network throughout the Galaxy.

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Handwritten below was:

Sorry about gumming you up, but you nearly got a lot worse. The Freighter captain says to tell Mr. Ruskin that he's very lucky his rotor blades didn't actually hit the Svingli field.

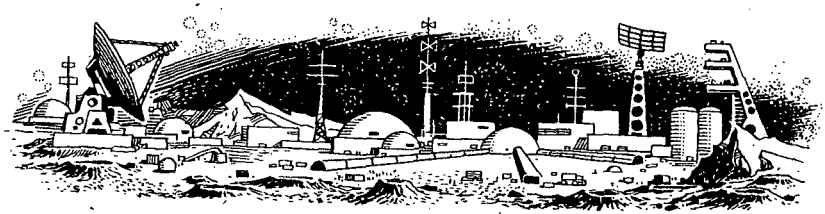
Oh, and Mr. Bernstein (or whoever): Kvek't'net's distribution department tells me this planet is far too isolationist in its trade system to be admitted to what they call Voshiwarsnithclu, or The Big Wide Money Thing. I've done my bit to remedy this, and if you track down all the free-sample lighters I sent, you'll probably be very embarrassed by whose doors you're peeking over.

Didn't mean to have so much fun at your expense, Jerry, but you know, in your own way, you guys are less suspicious than the Customs man who thought I was sneaking them in from Hong Kong.

Drop by again in about a week; I'll be at a home-office production conference until then. Their home, not mine.

Yours for the American free-enterprise system,

Mal Hindemith



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A SECOND SOLUTION TO THE THREE ROBOTS OF PROFESSOR TINKER
(from page 51)

Ask the robot on the left, "Is it true that the middle robot is the liar or the robot on the right is the truther?" The chart below shows the possible answers for each of the six permutations:

	Left	Middle	Right	Yes	No
1.	T	L	S	X	
2.	T	S	L		X
3.	L	T	S	X	
4.	L	S	T		X
5.	S	T	L	X	X
6.	S	L	T	X	X

As you can see from the chart, if the robot says yes, the middle robot must be a truther or a liar. If the robot says no, the robot on the right must be a truther or a liar.

If the answer is yes, say to the middle robot: "If I were to ask you if the lady with the necklace is the oldest, would you say yes?" Assume the girl with the necklace is indeed the oldest. The truther will say yes and so will the liar! (The liar would have answered no to the first part of the question, so she must lie and say yes to Isomorph's entire question.) By similar reasoning, if the girl with the necklace is *not* the oldest, both the truther and the liar will say no. Therefore the second question is sufficient to decide if the girl with the necklace is the oldest.

If the robot on the left answers no to the first question, then the robot on the right must be either a truther or liar. The second question is then directed to her, with the same result.

"I just thought of a better solution to your first problem," said Isomorph. "I can learn the identity of all three girls, no matter how they sit, by asking just *two* questions."

What does Isomorph have in mind? His solution is on page 111.

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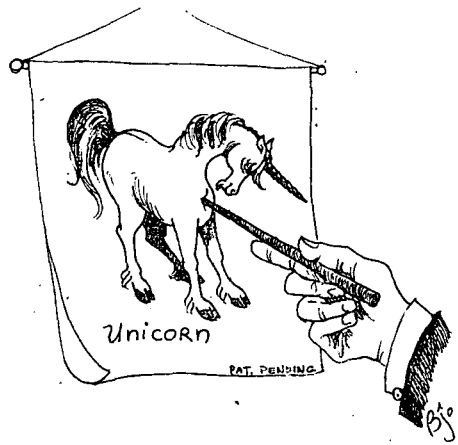
TWISTING THE UNICORN'S TALE

by Robert Karl Bohm

art: Bjo Trimble



The author taught classical languages and literature at Muhlenberg College, Allentown PA, for 9 years as sole member of that department—as endangered a species as the unicorn of his tale. He is now minister of St. Timothy's Lutheran Church in Allentown. In his spare time, he writes, and is an amateur astronomer; with his wife he raises bees, grapes, and their two sons. While the Reverend Mr. Bohm has been published in journals on classical studies and astronomy, this is his first fiction sale.

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"Unicorns! What a waste of time! All the important things we could be studying but Master Firks just goes on and on about unicorns," complained Dersin as they all waited for their teacher to make his appearance.

"Dragons sometimes, or elves. They're just as bad," responded another student.

"Oh, I don't know," said Lance. "It's sort of fun."

"I didn't think schooling was supposed to be a matter of fun," Dersin answered. "I thought we were supposed to be learning something useful."

"That's right," chimed in Penvil. "My father could be using me on the farm. Instead he has to do all the work himself and on top of it scrimp and cut corners to pay old Firks his fees. When I come home each day I'm ashamed. My father asks what I learned. And I have to tell him about unicorns or dragons. He just sort of looks puzzled and says Firks must know what he's doing. Sometimes I lie and tell him we studied soil enrichment or season signs or bee cultivation. Then he lights up and starts asking me questions. Usually I can't even understand his question, let alone answer it. So I have to change the subject. I bet my dad knows more important stuff than Firks any day."

"You guys don't know when you've got it good," Lance claimed. "Would you really rather be learning how to plow or put in irrigation ditches? Then you might as well stay home and have your father teach you. But I bet I know what'd happen. First chance you'd get, off you'd sneak to a favorite spot in the woods to spend the afternoon by a stream or under a tree daydreaming. And here's the perfect opportunity. Our fathers send us off and even pay for it so we'll have a chance to avoid real work and daydream all day long. I guess we'll learn about real work soon enough when the time comes, but 'til then I'm going to enjoy what we've got."

"That's pretty selfish and unfair," said Rendor, "and it's not all useless. Do you remember Firks's lecture about the habitat of the unicorn? Of course it was all nonsense about the unicorn—nobody really believes in them anymore, even if they do talk about them from time to time. But all his analysis of habitats was very helpful. I had thought woods were woods until Firks explained about all the different kinds: nascent forests and transition forests and terminal forests, the difference between valley fills and crown stands, grove clusters and drainage runs. All you have to do is overlook all the business about what the unicorn prefers and why

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and you have something really practical. There's a thick oak grove on a corner of our land that's always bothered my father; it's too big and dense to cut out. But Firks got me thinking when he was describing what he called Vegetation Populations Congenial to Habitation by Unicorns. Oak forests get along well with mistletoe. So I found some and transplanted it to our woods and come December I sold bunches in the village, enough to buy new boots for my father and one of those special butter churns for my mother—the kind where you can sit and turn a crank instead of getting a kink in your back bending over and pumping up and down. They were both pretty proud and pleased and next year I'll probably do even better."

"But it's still a bother," commented Penvil. "Why didn't he just give a lecture on Making the Most of Your Land and tell us what grows best where, and how to cultivate it, and the best way to market it? We'd get a lot farther if he dropped all the excess baggage about unicorns. For example, Marle, you're the best one when we have drawing lessons. I understand the miller is even going to use your sketches for building his new mill. That's useful stuff. Don't you resent all the time we spend sketching unicorns? Unicorns frontal, unicorns lateral, unicorns rampant, unicorns in repose, unicorns leaping. I think Firks is unbalanced. Wouldn't you rather draw real things?"

Marle looked up from the sketch pad he was doodling in and gave his thoughtful answer. "Unicorns or mills, it's really all the same to me. Both are chances to put lines and curves together to the best effect. And in a way the unicorn is especially good training, 'cause I've never seen one and I have to imagine what it looks like. That's a lot harder than sitting by a tree or farmhouse and just copying it, 'cause I have to make it up out of my own mind. Then when I try to draw something like a new mill I'm better able to make it up exactly right for the spot it's in, not just copy some mill I saw somewhere else. So imagining and drawing something unreal like a unicorn helps me imagine something like a mill that might be unreal right now but can become real if somebody builds it."

"Oh, that works just fine for Marle; he has a good imagination to begin with," Dersin asserted. "But tell me this. Does anybody have a better imagination than Firks? The elaborate rigamarole he spins off about unicorns or dragons—remember his lecture on Proper Protocol When Meeting an Elf?—proves he's perfect at making things up. But what practical good does it do him? Does

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he go out and peddle new ideas to farmers about how they could improve their plowing techniques? Has he ever invented anything to make work easier or faster? No. The silly old story teller just gets pennies for chattering nonsense at us all day. I often suspect our parents are just using him as a disguised babysitting service."

"Why not ask him?" Penvil replied. "Ask him to show us how this unicorn and dragon stuff can help us on the farm or ask him to use his imagination and come up with some really practical lessons that'll impress our parents."

"I've got a better idea," said Lance. "Let's have some fun with him and tell him somebody saw a real unicorn out in the hills. We sure ought to know enough to bluff out a good story."

"So what good is that?" asked Dersin.

"I bet old Firks would really get excited," said Marle, sketching rapidly, "jumping around, waving his arms, opening his squinty eyes wide. That'd be quite a sight to see."

"Not much chance of that," Penvil claimed. "He'll probably just launch into a dry-as-dust lecture in his usual dull style without any animation: Statistical Frequencies of the Observations of Unicorns. Try to derive something practical from that."

"Well, it might help us some with our math," countered Rendor. "But what I'd really want to see is whether he would take us out and try to track it down or simply stay here and talk about it in the abstract."

"Who's going to spring it on him?" inquired Penvil. "We'll have to get it all set up and he's already rather late so we don't have much time. It was your idea, Lance. Can you do it?"

"Certainly," Lance answered. "By now I know so much about unicorns that I could tell a story from now 'til Michaelmas. There's a practical result to all this bother we've had with unicorns: a good practical joke on old Firks. Bet he runs right down to the village square, gathers the men who're in for market, mounts the tree stump, and gives an all-day lecture on Proper Organization and Deployment of Search Parties for Hunting the Unicorn. Maybe we could even rig a horse with an artificial horn and take it around some outlying farms and let the farmers catch a glimpse of it."

"That wouldn't fool anybody. Don't you remember Comparative Anatomy of the Unicorn and Major Equine Groups? There's a big difference."

"Outlying farmers aren't going to know that; they never went to school to learn such important frivolity."

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"Maybe we should wait until the whole thing is planned out in detail," Lance suggested. "I hear Firks crunching up the walk now."

"Gentlelads!" Firks began speaking as soon as he burst in the door, instead of waiting as usual until he was composed behind the lectern with all his notes neatly organized in front of him. "It's an occasion of great moment."

Talking all the while, he strode to the front of the room but ignored the lectern. "I was in the village early to make some purchases before all the more choice wares had been sold, and was unfortunately detained there by the rumor. Those of your fathers who were at the market asked me to dismiss you at once and to send you to meet them at your homes. They will have need of your training and expertise in the quest. Gentlelads, a unicorn has been sighted."

Mouths and eyes opened widely. Some stammering questions were begun but never finished as student stared at student and Firks, oblivious to the class, sat down at his desk, opened a long drawer, and began sorting through notes with a broad smile. The mental confusion among the young scholars finally erupted into physical confusion as they leaped to their feet and rushed for the door in a mixture of joy that class had been cancelled and curiosity to find out from their fathers just what was really happening.

When the room was empty, Firks looked up from the drawer, tipped his chair back, put his feet on the desk and his hands behind his head, chuckled contentedly, and closed his eyes for a snooze.

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THE SF CONVENTIONAL CALENDAR
by Erwin S. Strauss

It's still too cold to spend a weekend outdoors, so spend one indoors at an SF con(vention) with your favorite SF authors. When writing, enclose a self-addressed, stamped envelope (SASE). If you phone, do it 10 AM to 10 PM only, and not collect. Give your name and reason for calling. If you can't reach a con, call me. I'm at (301) 794-7718. If my machine answers, leave your number; I'll call you back. For a later con list and a sample of SF folksongs, send me an SASE at 10015 Greenbelt Rd. #101, Seabrook MD 20801. Our apologies to WindyCon (Chicago in Oct.) for past listing troubles.

NorWesCon, Mar. 23-25, Seattle WA. Phil Farmer. **Box 24207, Seattle WA 98124. (206) 822-9129**

AggieCon, Mar. 29-Apr. 1, College Station TX. **MSC Box 5718, Col. Sta. TX 77844. (713) 845-1515**

OrangeCon, Mar. 30-Apr. 1, Orlando FL. **Box 15072B, Orlando FL 32858. (305) 275-5957**

LunaCon, Mar. 30-Apr. 1, New York NY. **Cole, 1171 E. 8th, Brooklyn NY 11230. (212) 252-9759**

FoolCon, Mar. 31-Apr. 1, Kansas City, MO. **SAO, JCCC, Overland Park, KS 62210. (913) 888-8500 X 480**

AmberCon, Apr. 6-8, Wichita KS. Zelazny. **505 N. Rock #909, Wichita KS 67206. (316) 685-9436**

BaltiCon, Apr. 13-15, Baltimore MD. **BSFS, Box 686, Baltimore MD 21203. (301) 467-0868**

MiniCon, Apr. 13-15, Minneapolis MN. A big tradition. **Box 2128 Loop Sta., Mpls. MN 55402**

Kubla Khan, Apr. 27-29, Nashville TN. **647 Devon Drive, Nashville TN 37220. (615) 832-8402**

ByobCon, May 4-6, Kansas City MO. **Bailey, 4228 Greenwood, Ks. City MO 69111. (816) 753-2420**

BASF-Con, May 19, Washington DC. **Wynn, 13439 Idlewild Dr., Bowie MD 20715. (301) 262-4692**

DisClave, May 26-28, Washington DC. Zelazny. **2004 Erie #2, Adelphi MD 20783. (301) 439-2952**

Just ImagiCon, May 25-27, Memphis TN. **4475 Martha Cole, Memphis TN 38118. (901) 365-2132**

V-Con, May 25-27, Vancouver, Can. Jack Vance. **Box 48701, Vanc., BC V7X 1A6. (604) 263-9969**

PenultiCon, May 25-28, Denver CO. C. J. Cherryh. **Box 11545, Denver CO 80211. (303) 433-9774**

MidWestCon, June 24-26, Cincinnati OH. **Tabakow, 3953 St. John's Terr., Cincinnati OH 45236**

WesterCon 32, July 4-8, San Francisco CA, Lupoff. **195 Alhambra #9, San Francisco CA 94123**

Darkover Council, July 13-15, New York NY Bradley. **Box 355, Bkln. NY 11219. (516) 781-6795**

DeepSouthCon, July 20-22, New Orleans LA. **1903 Dante, New Orleans LA 70118. (504) 861-2602**

OKon, July 21-22, Tulsa OK. Jack Williamson & M. Middleton. **Box 4229, Tulsa OK 74104**

Conebulus, July 20-22, Syracuse NY. **C. G., 619 Stolp Av., Syracuse NY 13207. (315) 471-7003**

SeaCon, Aug. 23-27, Brighton (near London), England. The World SF Convention for 1979. Book now, before the hotels fill. **Jan Howard Finder, Box 428, Latham NY 12110. (518) 783-7673**

NorthAmeriCon, Aug. 30-Sept. 3, Louisville KY. The continental con, while the WorldCon is abroad. Fred Pohl, Lester Del Rey and our own George Scithers. Everything the WorldCon has but the Hugos—plus a river cruise. **Box 58009, Louisville KY 40258. (502) 636-5340**

NovaCon 9 (West), Nov. 2-4, Albany NY. "First British con in US." **Contact SeaCon (above)**

Future Party, Nov. 22-25, Albany NY. **606 Alpine Vlge., E. Greenbush NY 12061. (518) 477-4320**

NutriaCon, Nov. 30-Dec. 2, New Orleans LA. **6221 Wadsworth, N. Orl's LA 70122. (504) 283-4833**

NorEasCon II, Aug. 29-Sept. 1, 1980, Boston MA. The World SF Convention for 1980. Damon Knight, Kate Wilhelm, B. Pelz. Join now for $20. **Box 46, MIT Station, Cambridge MA 02139**

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THIS ISN'T THE WAY WE DID IT IN REHEARSAL

by Eric Loranger

Mr. Loranger is a second-year medical student from Detroit MI with background training in anthropology, physiology and neurotrauma, and cancer research. He devotes one and one-half shelves of a very long bookcase to 82 books of Asimov. This story is his first sale.

Something *definitely* was wrong. The woman woke up from an induced slumber and gently touched the area under her left breast. A rib was missing. She turned, still lying peacefully amidst the clover, and saw something that had not been there before. It was a shiny, fire-engine red 1957 Edsel.

CUT

Something was very, very wrong. The woman woke up from an induced somnolence and cautiously stroked the area under her right breast. Before, there were thirteen ribs on that side, she was sure of it. Her attention was suddenly drawn to her left, where an agent from the Northern States Apple Commission, dressed in snakeskin shoes, was offering her a tall, cool, refreshing glass of cider. . . .

CUT

It was not right, whatever it was. The man had fallen asleep during the heat of the midday. When he awoke, he palpated the right side of his chest. One of his ribs was gone. Turning over on his left side, he was startled to see an exact duplicate of himself staring into his eyes. "Egads, I've been cloned. . . ."

CUT

There must have been a misprint in the instruction manual. The man had dozed off and the subsequent operation was a success. Yet, when the dust cleared . . . when the dust cleared . . . like good ashes, good dust is hard to find these days.

CUT

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It is all the bureaucracy's fault. Everything was right on schedule. The heavens, the earth, the flora, and fauna. Woman had gotten lonely right on cue. She was just entering Stage I sleep when it was pointed out that an environmental impact study had to be performed first.

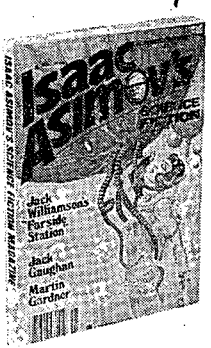
CUT

What is this universe coming to? Man had awakened to find woman. Man insisted that woman tend to his needs, while he went off and had a good time. Woman proclaimed her rights under Title IX. Man refused to be legislated into equality. It was apparent that I should have stuck with a rib rather than using man's frontal lobe. The operation has made him too narrow-minded.

CUT

Instead of a seventh attempt, I turned the whole project over to a Mr. C. Darwin and let him worry about whatever evolves.

Now Monthly



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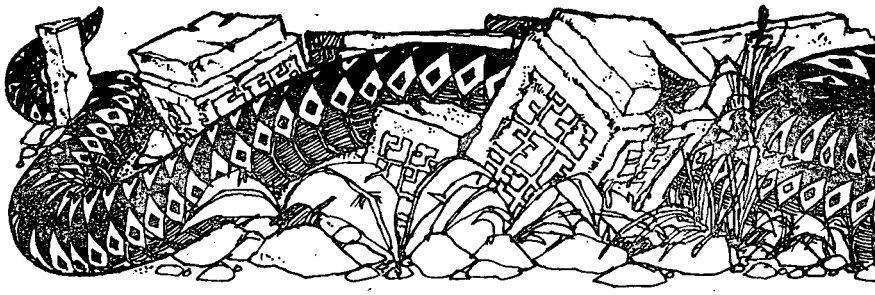

PLACES TO CRAWL THROUGH

Ms. St. Clair was born in Kansas, but has lived in California since she was seventeen. She has a Master's degree in Greek from the University of California. Since she got it a long time ago, she hopes that nobody will ask her to read Greek for them. She and her husband Eric grow almost all of their own vegetables; their biggest problem is the deer, which have developed a depraved appetite for rhubarb leaves and artichoke tops, one of which is poison and the other bitterer than gall. She has been selling fantasy and science fiction since 1946.

"And this," said the guide impressively, "is the holy navel stone, the center of the whole Ynorian system of tomb, snake, and ancestor worship. This is the spot where the sacred snakes were brought to be consecrated."

Ms. Vison listened, a small frown on her face. The holy navel stone didn't look particularly holy or impressive. It looked, really, like a small flat rock on which somebody had spilled a bucket of soapsuds and not bothered to wipe the spillage up. But she supposed there would be some sort of legend to account for the soapsuds. Oh, dear. What a lot of Jo-Tun legends she'd listened to! Each place on the tour itinerary was more disappoint . . . No, she wouldn't let herself think so. She was having a wonderful time. The tour was costing too much for her not to enjoy it. She *was*

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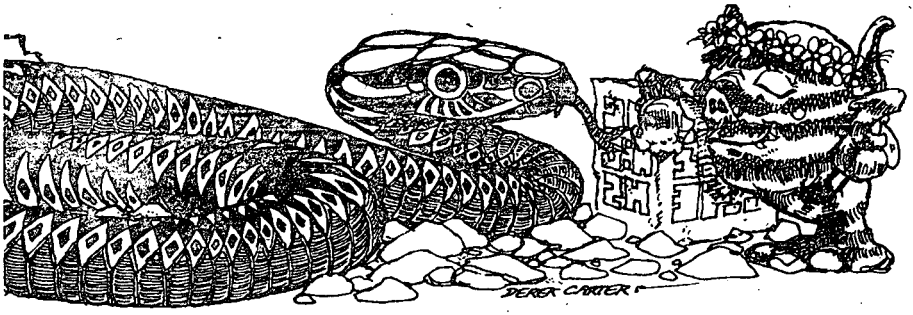

by Margaret St. Clair

art: Derek Carter

enjoying it. All the same . . .

The guide told the party the legend about the soapsuds. It was as pointless as all the other legends Ms. Vison had listened to. Then the tour party moved on to the next point of interest.

This was a small enclosure with waist-high walls of pinkish stone overgrown with moss. It was cool, anyhow, which was more than could be said for most of Ynor. The guide explained that it was sacred to a divinity called Semi-hwynti.

Ms. Vison shifted from one foot to the other as the guide went through his talk. How her feet did hurt! She hated walking, always did. What was the matter with her, anyhow? Nobody else in the tour party ever got tired, wanted to rest, or had sore feet. Sights were what they had come to Jo-Tun for, and they were indefatigable in pursuit of them, with cameras, and five-sen tactipression film, whereas she . . . They were getting what they wanted from Jo-Tun and she wasn't, that was the heart of the matter.

She had expected—well, what had drawn her to Jo-Tun in the first place? An anticipation of flowery glades, bosky walks, scented—not scented, perhaps—but with lush moist growth, interspersed with fascinating relics of Jo-Tunian antiquity. The surrounding sand would only make the rich green greener. And now the guide said that the ice cap melt-off had been poor at Ynor for the last three Jo-Tunian years. The flower walks had gone to seed, the rainbow lagoon was nearly dried up, the glare of the sun and the sandy dust made her head ache.

She sniffed. Oh, don't be silly, she told herself. To be disappointed in a tour wasn't such a tragedy. A lot worse things could happen to her than that. The others seemed to like the tour well enough.

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Yes, but this was supposed to be a pleasure. She'd had to negotiate a tremendous loan with the credit union. Hyper-space travel was expensive. Years from now she would still be paying off the loan. To be disappointed in the tour might not be a large-scale tragedy, but it was certainly something she was entitled to regret.

"There is an old Jo-Tun superstition about this enclosure," said the guide, speeding up as he reached the end of his speech. "They say that if you make the proper sacrifice, facing north in the sacred enclosure, you will find out who you really are."

Ms. Vison blinked. Was that what the guide had actually said? "Find out who you really are"? It wasn't reasonable.

"What do you mean by that?" she asked the guide impulsively. "I don't understand how anybody can find out who he really is. He already knows."

The guide shrugged. "That's what the old folks say, lady. They say a lot of things. Don't ask me what they mean by it."

"What sort of sacrifice?" Ms. Vison persisted. The others were all looking at her. She could feel her ears turning red. She would have liked to be able to hide.

"A little blood," the guide answered unhesitatingly. He gave her a nasty look, a look that dared her to ask more questions. Ms. Vison was silent. The guide's face relaxed.

"Now, folks," he said, "if you'll come along we'll visit the famous bubble fountain. This fountain, discovered in the Jo-Tunian year 331 by the explorer Gla, is the most famous sight of the whole Jo-Tun canal system. It . . ."

Ms. Vison brightened. To call the bubble fountain "famous" was a gross understatement. She'd heard about it all her life. The travel agent had raved about it. Could it be—yes, it could—that this one sight would justify her whole tour? This could be the experience that would pay for everything! She hurried after the guide, forgetting her aching head and throbbing feet.

It was a longish walk to the bubble fountain. The sun burned down through the thin air, the gray ashlar pavements of Ynor radiated back the heat. No wonder people had thought for so long that there was no stable life on Jo-Tun! Yet here and there patches of greenery had escaped the pervasive drought, and set Ms. Vison to thinking of the planet as it should have been—banks of rich foliage with green-shadowed openings, glimpses of nacreous temple columns down leafy vistas, pallid, wonderful marsh flowers. "Here we are, folks," said the guide.

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They lined up around the coping of the fountain. "The fountain only jets intermittently," the guide said unnecessarily. "It's due in a couple of minutes from now."

They waited. The basin around the fountain was damp, and a pretty pale-blue flower trailed over the ground. The air was cooler here. They waited some more.

There was a noise like somebody clearing his throat. Bubbles—dazzling iridescent bubbles—began to form. Ms. Vison held her breath. Was it going to be all right?

The bubbles formed into a column. Oh, it was lovely. The travel books said the bubbles often reached a height of seven meters. It would be wonderful.

The column ascended. About half a meter up, the iridescence forked. It toppled. For an instant the basin was full of peacock's tail bubbles, opulent and wonderful. One could understand the explorer Gla's astonishment and subsequent wild enthusiasm. Then the bubbles began to break, each with a tiny twinkle and a moist plopping. In an instant all that was left of the famous bubble fountain display was a slight extra dampness in the air.

"Show's over, folks," said the guide. "The next display will be about five hours from now."

"Will the jet be taller then?" asked Ms. Vison. She had not yet let herself realize how disappointed she was.

"No," the guide answered. "You were lucky, lady. You saw a good tall jet. Since the drought . . .

And that was that, Ms. Vison thought. Just another Jo-Tunian marvel that hadn't turned out very well.

Uncomplainingly she followed the others back to the tour 'copter. She refused an invitation to go that night to see a group of native dancers near Amao. She was tired, she told the perplexed tour leader. She'd rather stay in her room and rest.

Tired, yes, but rest wasn't easy. From the vine-grown balcony of her room she could see the others setting out for the native dancers. Would she feel better if she were going with them? She didn't think so. She'd seen a lot of native dances already. That wasn't the answer.

She put the shade over the glow-worms in the light and lay down in her plaited hammock. Tears began to roll down her cheeks. The wind was drier than ever. Before her tears could reach her neck, they had dried up. Her face was quite dry when she slid into an exhausted sleep.

Her dreams, oddly enough, were pleasant. She wandered

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through rich verdure, she slipped through green openings. Even the pallid marsh flowers were present. And when, changing slightly, her dreams showed her as the queen of the flower festival and of the seven Jo-Tun marshes, bowing regally to all and sundry subjects, there was nothing in the least unusual in it.

The light of the seven moons, staring in through her windows, wakened her. She heard voices below. It was the other tour members, coming back from their evening of native dances at Amao. They sounded happy enough. They hadn't expected as much from Jo-Tun as she had, so they were more easily satisfied.

She turned in the hammock. What lay before her, anyway? Earth again, via hyper-space drive, and forty-eight months of repaying the credit union loan. She'd go back to teaching advanced calculator programming to ninth-graders at Brattleboro Middle School. She wouldn't even have a trip to Jo-Tun to fantasize about in the evenings. And of course she'd have to tell her friends that she'd had a wonderful, wonderful time. . . . She'd get a sleeping pill from the bathroom. If she could get back to sleep promptly, she might be able to go on with her dream.

The moons' light lay like a pool of water on the floor. She stood irresolute before it, almost as if she hated to wet her feet. Then as blindly as a sleepwalker, she threw a large loose wrap around her shoulders, fastened it with a gold-pointed pin, and moved out into the full moonlight on her balcony.

There, and there, and there. The light showed her that the vines that clung to the balcony could serve as a ladder. If she put her feet carefully, she could get down well enough. But she had better hurry. The moons' light was brilliant now, but it would soon be gone. She stepped over the low railing, crouched, and then swung her body out into space.

There, and there, and there. It was as easy as a dream. She got to the ground without scratching her hands or even being out of breath.

Ynor by moonlight was better than by day. Ms. Vison had thought the ruins were a maze of walls, but she found the enclosure sacred to Semi-hwynti without one false step. The pinkish walls and green moss were flat black and white in the moonlight.

She unpinned the loose wrap and let it fall to the ground. North was . . . yes, it must be the direction to the right. She jabbed her left index finger with the gold pointed-pin, and squeezed out two drops of blood. She shook them from her finger on to the ground.

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She had a sense of climax. How would it feel, to find out who she really was? Certainly not the Ms. Vison who taught restless youngsters calculator programming. She had never been at ease with the person she was.

But time passed, and nothing happened. She stood barefooted, stifling yawns, until she began to shiver with the predawn chill. And nothing happened. Nothing was going to happen,. The sacrifice to Semi-hwynti was just another Jo-Tunian marvel that hadn't turned out well.

No. No, she wouldn't believe it. She had been so sure, so confident. She must have done something wrong.

Had she, after all, made the proper sacrifice?

The guide had said "a little blood." Well, two drops of blood was little enough. But perhaps it ought to have been drawn otherwise, by a crooked path.

She hunted on the ground until she found the gold-pointed pin. She broke off a clump of moss and laid it ready to one side. With the pin she drew a long, deep, curving pattern on her left arm. She finished it off with two diagonal strokes. She used the clump of moss to wipe up the oozing blood.

She held out her wounded arm to the paling heavens. "Semi-hwynti save me," Ms. Vison hissed.

There was a plop—in the air? in her head?—and a being appeared.

It was still a good two hours before dawn, and most of the moons were down. All the same, she could see the being well enough. It was a little shorter than she, squat-bodied, and striped horizontally in very dark red or blue. Around its broad head there was a wreath of pale flowers, and long pearly pendants glimmered in its ears. It had no neck.

"Hello," said the being in a mushy voice. "I am the revealer of identity, the equalizer of disappointments, the avenger of romanticism. I am also the come-out-evener. You called me, I think. Jo-Tun is the planet where things get done." And it cut a caper with its small striped feet.

Ms. Vison found her tongue. "Go away," she said.

"Pish-tush," said the being. "I could obey you, of course, but I won't. What would be the point? You need to find out who you are."

"No, I don't," said Ms. Vison.

"Yes, you do," the being replied firmly. It cleared its throat. "Many, many years ago," it said impressively, "there was a mi-

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gration from Jo-Tun to Earth. The ark included, naturally enough, two of the sacred Ynorian snakes. Like a lot of Ynorian things, the snakes had a high degree of lability."

"Lab—? I never heard of a Jo-Tunian migration to Earth. And I don't see what that has to do with anything, anyhow," retorted Ms. Vison.

"Don't you?" answered the being. It crossed its eyes at her and giggled. 'Well, well. The colonists from Jo-Tun got lost, but some of their cargo remained.

"In case you get to wondering about it later, a chameleon can match itself to the color of its background, but it remains a chameleon. No wonder you have always been so uncomfortable! Phenotypes may hide genotypes, but genotypes sleep in the blood.

"Enough of this explanation. We are wasting time. Shed yourself, please. Shed yourself."

Ms. Vison felt an unbearable itching down her spine. It came to a peak just in the small of her back. She put her hand around to scratch it. To her horror, she found that there was a crack, a gap, a growing fissure, running from her tail-bone to her shoulder blades, and widening as it ran.

It didn't hurt; but oh, how it tickled! She wanted to laugh, to cough, to whimper. She put her hands to her breast and discovered that she was splitting there too. She was coming apart, she was losing herself. "Wuh wuh wuh," Ms. Vison said.

There was a moment of real pain. Then, with a final convulsion like a sneeze, her skin split completely. She was out.

"Do you know who you are?" the being said.

She would faint, it was horrible, she couldn't stand it. She opened her mouth to tell him so. "Sssssss," Ms. Vison said.

"Yes, that's perfectly true," retorted the being. "Your lability has manifested itself. You are one of the sacred snakes."

Oh, she *would* faint. "It's not so bad," the being urged after a minute. "You're the senior snake, the queen, the head of the whole clan."

Queen? Was that what her dream had meant? That she was queen of the marshes, the flower walks, the seven bosky cities of the canal system? A descendant, precariously clothed in terrestrial flesh, of the emigrating Jo-Tunian sacred snakes?

"You might as well make the best of it," the being said.

Yes, she might. The drought would not last forever, the melt-off would be better next year. The future held the promise of dampness, of places to crawl through, of green openings. She would

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stay on Jo-Tun forever, she would be happy there. Her feet would never hurt her again.

The being was still watching. Ms. Vison tried to say "Thank you," but the only sound that would leave her flat coppery head was an inexpressive hiss.

"You're more than welcome," said the being. It was beginning to get a little thin around the edges, but was still solid in the middle.

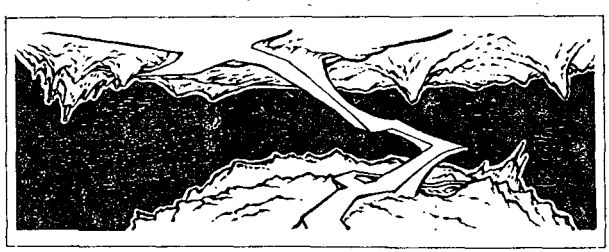
"You make quite a handsome snake," it went on kindly. "I'm glad you're taking it so sensibly.

"Yes, the melt-off will be better next year. These things go in cycles. And I'll tell you a little secret: your formal coronation will take place then, on the day of maximal flow."

"Sssssss?" replied Ms. Vison.

"Yes, really. It's something to look forward to, isn't it? All that pomp and pageantry, and you in the center of everything? I'll probably be in attendance."

The being was almost gone now, but it smiled benignly. "Until then," it said as it faded out, "until then, dear queen, have a nice crawl."



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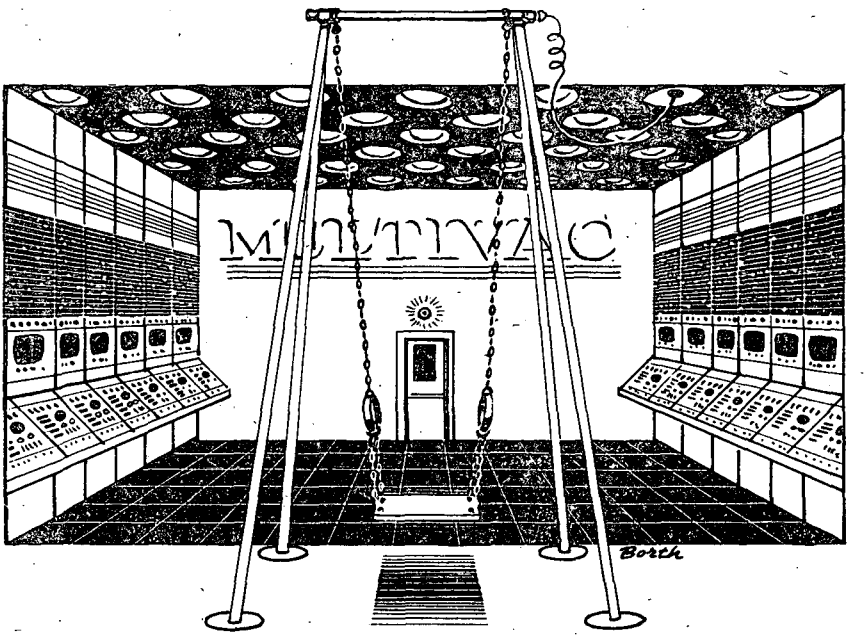
POINT OF VIEW

by Isaac Asimov

art: Frank Borth



The illustrator of this short story, Frank Borth, lives on the eastern tip of Long Island, speaks well of the fishing out there, and is perhaps better known as a member of the team of Whipple & Borth, who write and draw the daily comic panel, There Oughta Be A Law. *The story is* ©*1975 by Isaac Asimov, from* Boy's Life.

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Roger came looking for his father, partly because it was Sunday, and by rights his father shoudn't have been at work, and Roger wanted to be sure that everything was all right.

Roger's father wasn't hard to find, because all the people who worked with Multivac, the giant computer, lived with their families right on the grounds. They made up a little city by themselves, a city of people that solved all the world's problems.

The Sunday receptionist knew Roger. "If you're after your father," she said, "he's down Corridor L, but he may be too busy to see you."

Roger tried anyway, poking his head past one of the doors where he heard the noise of men and women. The corridors were a lot emptier than on weekdays, so it was easy to find where the people were working.

He saw his father at once, and his father saw him. His father didn't look happy and Roger decided at once that everything *wasn't* all right.

"Well, Roger," said his father. "I'm busy, I'm afraid."

Roger's father's boss was there, too, and he said, "Come on, Atkins, take a break. You've been at this thing for nine hours and you're not doing us any good anymore. Take the kid for a bite at the commissary. Take a nap and then come back."

Roger's father didn't look as if he wanted to. He had an instrument in his hand that Roger knew was a current-pattern analyzer, though he didn't know how it worked. Roger could hear Multivac chuckling and whirring all about.

But then Roger's father put down the analyzer. "Okay. Come on, Roger. I'll race you for a hamburger and we'll let these wise guys here try and find out what's wrong without me."

He stopped a while to wash up and then they were in the commissary with big hamburgers in front of them and french fries and soda pop.

Roger said, "Is Multivac out of order still, Dad?"

His father said gloomily, "We're not getting anywhere, I'll tell you that."

"It seemed to be working. I mean, I could hear it."

"Oh, sure, it's working. It just doesn't always give the right answers."

Roger was thirteen and he'd been taking computer-programming since the fourth grade. He hated it sometimes and wished he lived back in the 20th Century, when kids didn't use to take it—but it was helpful sometimes in talking to his father.

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Roger said, "How can you tell it doesn't always give the right answers, if only Multivac knows the answers?"

His father shrugged and for a minute Roger was afraid he would just say it was too hard to explain and not talk about it—but he almost never did that.

His father said, "Son, Multivac may have a brain as large as a big factory, but it still isn't as complicated as the one we have here," and he tapped his head. "Sometimes, Multivac gives us an answer we couldn't calculate for ourselves in a thousand years, but just the same something clicks in our brains and we say, 'Whoa! Something's wrong here!' Then we ask Multivac again and we get a *different* answer. If Multivac were right, you see, we should always get the same answer to the same question. When we get different answers, one of them is wrong.

"And the thing is, son, how do we know we always catch Multivac? How do we know that some of the wrong answers don't get past us? We may rely on some answer and do something that may turn out disastrously five years from now. Something's wrong inside Multivac and we can't find out what. And whatever is wrong is getting worse."

"Why should it be getting worse?" asked Roger.

His father had finished his hamburger and was eating the french fries one by one. "My feeling is, son," he said, thoughtfully, "that we've made Multivac the wrong smartness."

"Huh?"

"You see, Roger, if Multivac were as smart as a man, we could talk to it and find out what was wrong no matter how complicated it was. If it were as dumb as a machine, it would go wrong in simple ways that we could catch easily. The trouble is, it's *half*-smart, like an idiot. It's smart enough to go wrong in very complicated ways, but not smart enough to help us find out what's wrong. —And that's the wrong smartness."

He looked very gloomy. "But what can we do? We don't know how to make it smarter—not yet. And we don't dare make it dumber either, because the world's problems have become so serious and the questions we ask are so complicated that it takes all Multivac's smartness to answer them. It would be a disaster to have him dumber."

"If you shut down Multivac," said Roger, "and went over him really carefully—"

"We can't do that, son," said his father. "I'm afraid Multivac must be in operation every minute of the day and night. We've

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got a big back-log of problems."

"But if Multivac continues to make mistakes, Dad, won't it *have* to be shut down? If you can't trust what it says—"

"Well," Roger's father ruffled Roger's hair, "we'll find out what's wrong, old sport, don't worry." But his eyes looked worried just the same. "Come on, let's finish and we'll get out of here."

"But, Dad," said Roger, "listen. If Multivac is half-smart, why does that mean it's an idiot?"

"If you knew the way we have to give it directions, son, you wouldn't ask."

"Just the same, Dad, maybe it's not the way to look at it. I'm not as smart as you; I don't know as much; but *I'm* not an idiot. Maybe Multivac isn't like an idiot, maybe it's like a kid."

Roger's father laughed. "That's an interesting point of view, but what difference does it make?"

"It could make a lot of difference," said Roger. "You're not an idiot, so you don't see how an idiot's mind would work; but I'm a kid, and maybe I would know how a kid's mind would work."

"Oh? And how would a kid's mind work?"

"Well, you say you've got to keep Multivac busy day and night. A machine can do that. But if you give a kid homework and told him to do it for hours and hours, he'd get pretty tired and feel rotten enough to make mistakes, maybe even on purpose. —So why not let Multivac take an hour or two off every day with no problem-solving—just letting it chuckle and whir by itself any way it wants to."

Roger's father looked as if he were thinking very hard. He took out his pocket-computer and tried some combinations on it. He tried some more combinations. Then he said, "You know, Roger, if I take what you said and turn it into Platt-integrals, it makes a kind of sense. And twenty-two hours we can be sure of is better than twenty-four that might be all wrong."

He nodded his head, but then he looked up from his pocket-computer and suddenly asked, as though *Roger* were the expert, "Roger, are you sure?"

Roger *was* sure. He said, "Dad, a kid's got to *play,* too."

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THE FALL OF THE *EISENSTEIN*

by Lowell A. Bangerter

The author is associate professor of German at the University of Wyoming, where he has been for eight years since receiving his doctorate at the University of Illinois. While this story is his first science fiction sale, the professor has published a number of scholarly essays and books on German and Austrian literature. His hobbies include home curing of fish and meat, sausage-making, tanning, and writing German poetry.

Grimly, Stene looked at the taut, expectant faces of the other members of the investigating committee, absently ordering the papers in front of him. "We've finally pieced together most of it," he said quietly.

"I certainly hope so," said Torgil, who was facing stiff opposition in his bid for reelection to the interplanetary council. "I've got to have something to feed to the hounds. I can't hold them off forever, and the loss of an interstellar cruiser to a rogue *monk* . . . Well, it's just not something that can be whitewashed!"

Stene frowned at the interruption, then continued. "As we suspected, it was a Vegan mind jumper that controlled Brother Toda and enabled him to take over the *Eisenstein*. We were able to learn quite a bit from the surviving officers during the debriefing which took place after the *Scarborough* and the *Leicester* disabled the *Eisenstein*. Apparently the Vegan got to Toda right after the *Eisenstein* lifted off from Deinan's World."

"But how can that be?" Estipp's face was gray. "We've known for several standard years about the Vegan plan to take over our fleet. Our precautions have always been adequate in the past. The Kerlow shields make it impossible for a Vegan to mind jump anyone who has one, and the Vegans simply don't have the power to do anything really threatening on their own, even with their limited telekinetic abilities. Surely Toda didn't submit himself voluntarily to the Vegan! It would be extremely difficult for me to believe that a cleric from a conservative order of the Church of the Autonomy of All Worlds could be tempted into such an unholy

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alliance, even given the extraordinary powers that result from a Vegan's entry into an intelligent host."

"Oh, he didn't submit himself voluntarily," Stene responded grumpily.

"Well then how did it happen?" Vertag shrieked.

Stene ignored the outburst, determined to tell the story in his own way. "As near as we can determine," he went on, "the Vegan entered the *Eisenstein* on Deinan's World, concealed in a piece of equipment consigned to the base on Felwa. Felwa, as you know, is a hot world, and the base commander had ordered a replacement fan for his big air-conditioner. The Vegan concealed itself in the fan while the ship was loading, and after lift-off used its telekinetic powers to break the fan out of the crate. It then attempted to use the fan as a tool to pry open the cargo hatch, wedging one of the fan's blades between the hatch and the casing. At that moment, Toda walked through the companionway, not wearing his Kerlow shield. The rest is obvious."

"What do you mean obvious?" screeched Torgil. "There's no way that even a Vegan could use the blade of a fan to pry open a cargo hatch from the inside, so that it could get at Toda!"

"It didn't," said Stene calmly. "When Toda heard the Vegan scraping against the hatch, he opened it to investigate. And of course at that point the Vegan jumped out of the prying fan and into the friar."

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ON TABLETOP UNIVERSES

by John M. Ford

art: George Barr

You can see them, out of the corner of your eye.

They're there in advertisements scattered through the SF magazines. They're on the bookstore shelves, somewhere between the hardbacks and the greeting cards. They're in your friends' conversation; have you been invited over for "an evening of D&D," and wondered if you should bring potato salad or call the Vice Squad?

They're science fiction and fantasy games, and they're a big business. Simulations Publications Inc. (SPI) of New York introduced *War of the Ring,* based on J.R.R. Tolkein, in November 1977, and in four weeks sold twenty-four thousand copies at $20 each. By way of comparison, a hardcover book selling for half that price or less that turned over five thousand copies in that time would be a "runaway bestseller." Over *one million* conflict-simulation games will be sold in North America this year, and a large and rapidly growing percentage of them will deal with science fiction and fantasy situations.

All right, so you've seen them, on the periphery of your vision; the four-color map of Middle-Earth covered with hexagons and brightly colored bits of cardboard; the inch-high metal figures of dragons and robots and starship soldiers brandishing plasma rifles; the endless booklets of rules that read like: "If the monster achieves Complete Surprise (DR 1) the players may read readied Scroll Spells but may not cast unprepared spells of the Third Level or higher. . . ."

And there's the rub. That sentence, complex and barely grammatical, is typical of the rules (nay, even the advertising copy!) of these games. Like much recent science fiction, they seem to have been created for an existing in-group who already share a set of assumptions and speak a language of their own.

The purpose of this article is not to sell you games (only a few will be mentioned by name) or even particularly to sell you *on* games. Rather, the idea is to state some of those private concepts in plain language, to make you less of an outsider looking in, so that the games may interest and attract on their own merits rather than pretty packaging and ad hype.

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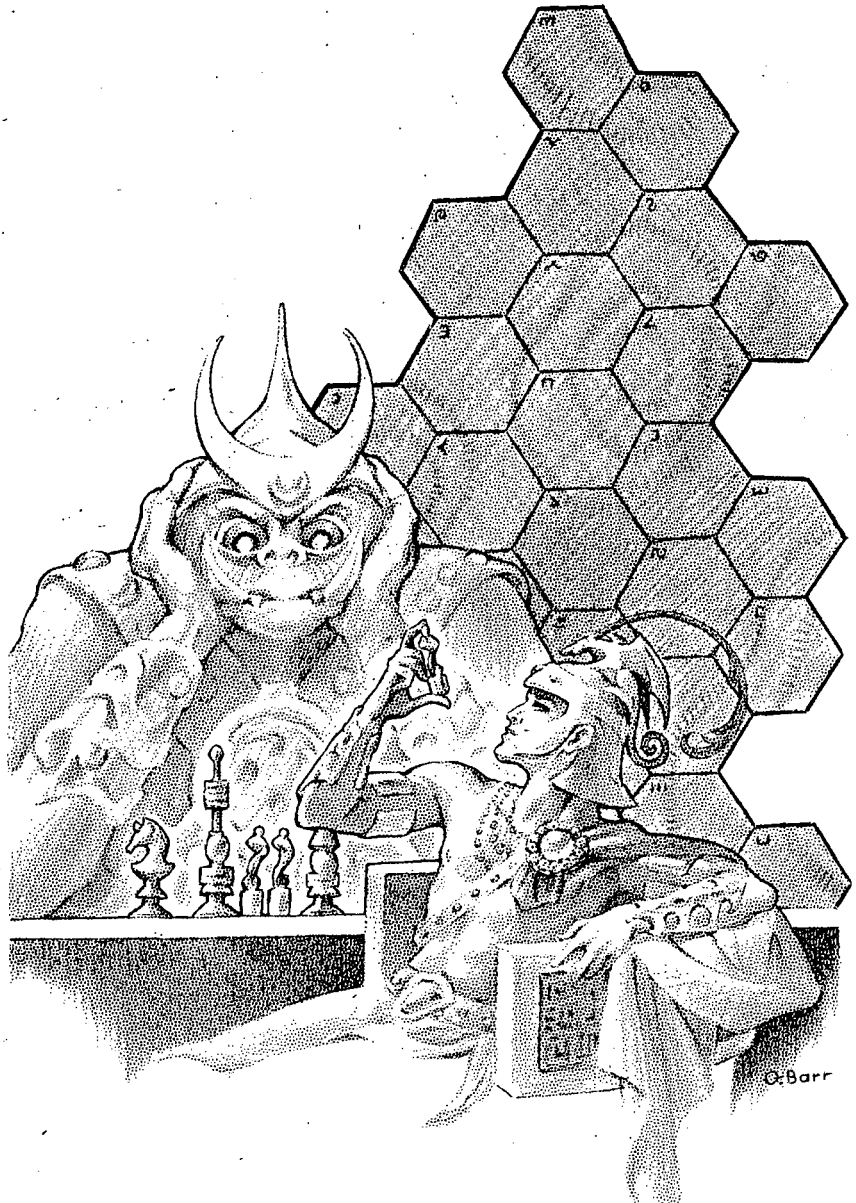

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ON THE BOARD

Like the title says, what sort of games am I talking about?

Conflict simulation games, whatever that means.

Conflict—(disagreements, not necessarily violent, between thinking beings and other beings, nature, or themselves)

—Simulation—(imitation of real-world processes)

—Games (activities with rules, played toward a goal; sometimes competitive, sometimes cooperative—and players can be deadly serious about something called a "game").

As happens when anyone sets out to define science fiction, the possibilities of the form overwhelm the words used to describe it; one drowns under a sea of "but"s and "except for"s and "defying classification are"s.

Perhaps an exclusionist definition would be clearer: what kind of games am I *not* talking about?

Most of the games to be found in the "Adult Games" section of the bookstore are "race" games (like Pachisi) or "track" games (like *Monopoly*). In fact, a large number of the "new" games released each seasion are no more than reworkings of one of these games—sometimes no more than renamings of the pieces and board spaces. There were, for instance, at least two Presidential-election games released during the 1972 campaign that were *Monopoly* in different dress, substituting states and their electoral votes for properties and their rents.

These are not "conflict simulations." Most of the great many stock-market games for sale represent the fluctuation of stock prices as a random process, which is at least an oversimplification. Ask a realtor if *Monopoly*—which contains no depreciation, interest rate changes, redlining, or urban renewal—faithfully represents his business. (Back to this in a moment.)

Gambling games are out, the essence of "simulations" being that risks such as the rolling of dice are present only to represent real-world risks (rain turning a general's path of advance to mud, malfunction of an air-to-air missile, the accidental death of a charismatic commander) and not for their own sake. If the game is staked upon a roll of the dice, it is because the player's decisions led him to that point.

Finally, there are the "abstract" games, games of position, such as Go and Chess. Checkers, Reversi, Nine Men's Morris, and so on clearly are not imitations of real events. (Backgammon is a race game, very similar in mechanics to Pachisi.)

Now consider Chess and Go. These are games of tactical man-

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euver, in which the pieces have defined functional roles. Long-ranged queens, leaping knights, slow pawns bearing the threat of knighting or queening, Go stones dropping like paratroops to harass the enemy's rear—now do we have a conflict-simulation game?

No. But the differences now are subtler, and will be better shown by a description of how conflict-simulation games do work.

The conflict-simulation/SF game generally has pieces and a board, but the model for their use is nearer Chess than *Monopoly*. Conflict-simulation game pieces represent specific real things, and the board indicates their relationship to one another.

In its most direct form, the pieces are military forces (from a man with a rifle to an armored corps), the board a map of the terrain over which they move and fight. The relationship is spatial: Falkenberg's Highlanders are *here*, the Dorsai Irregulars over *there*, across two rivers and a line of hills. Because of the intervening obstacles, they can only shoot at one another with long-range artillery.

The functions of board and pieces need not be so literal. As an opposite-end example, imagine a board covered with squares representing seats in a parliament (or, since I *am* discussing *SF* games, a Galactic Confederation). The pieces, probably small squares of cardboard, are printed with the name of a delegate, his home planet, and some numbers representing his political clout, his chance of reelection, and (say) his liberality on issues, on an arbitrary scale.

The positions of these pieces determine their relative positions of power in the Confederation. They move about as coalitions change, are removed through election (and assassination!), and are replaced by new appointments and delegates-elect. The relationship here is symbolic, like those corporate-structure diagrams that place the chairman of the board, the president, and the forty-seven vice-presidents in boxes connected by lines of power.

It might at this point be suggested that the *Monopoly* board is this sort of symbolic map. Actually, the *Monopoly* board is a partly-random device to determine what a player's buy and sell options are for the next turn. If some other system, such as drawing cards, were used to determine what properties were for sale each turn, *Monopoly* would be no better or worse a representation of what trading in land is really like.

And it of course isn't necessary to have a "board" at all. "Minia-

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tures" games are played with metal or plastic figures and vehicle/spaceship models over model terrain; hills, rivers, cardboard circles representing planets and stars, set up on a table or floor, instead of a printed map.

So: board and pieces. Chess is still a pretty viable analogy, at least of the symbolic-reference game. We break away from it, and from all non-simulation games, in the area of rules.

The rules of conflict simulation games attempt to imitate the effects of, and the constraints on, decisions made in the situation being gamed. While the rules of Chess are derived from the abilities of the elephants and soldiers of archaic Indian warfare (or perhaps Chinese; the truth is obscured by time) they no longer represent anything but limitations on the movement of the pieces. The rules governing movement of troops in a simulation game, on the other hand, relate to the distance and freedom of movement a real military unit would have over real terrain in the amount of time represented by one turn.

(An extreme—but not "wrong"—view is that Chess and Go *are* conflict simulation games, without chance elements, in which war is simplified to control of territory by interlocking fields of force. The trouble with this theory-equals-fact view is that it makes it impossible to differentiate games from reality. War is more than holding pieces of ground. A disarmament conference is not a poker game.)

A chess knight always moves two squares straight and one at right angles, never anything but. In a simulation game, a hovercraft tank might move two spaces over badly broken ground, five across a meadow, ten on open water. And while in chess the player must move exactly one piece each turn, never more or less, all of a player's tanks might move at once, or some of them, or none at all.

Similarly, any chesspiece correctly placed will always capture any enemy piece. Pawns take queens as automatically as the reverse. But a fully automated Bolo WV Combat Unit has an edge on a lone infantryman with a hand weapon—even an anti-Bolo weapon. And the rules, board game rules or miniatures manual, will reflect this, by giving the supertank a higher probability of killing the footsoldier than vice versa: say 85% against 10%.

Exactly this occurs in Edgar Rice Burroughs's *The Chessmen of Mars,* in which the pieces in the living Martian chess game are armed warriors, and it is not enough to move one's piece into the enemy's square; the two pieces must fight, and the survivor holds

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the space.

And how do game pieces "fight?" By a comparison of their strengths and weaknesses.

In the Galactic Confederation example given above, the game counters were described as bearing numbers, which indicated the delegate's abilities and his/her stand on issues. In a military game, these numbers, or "factors," will register the unit's firepower—"Attack Strength" or "Attack Factor" are common terms—its ability to withstand enemy fire—"Defense Factor"—and possibly its movement distance, weapons range, morale, identification number . . . game designers have developed a great facility for cramming data onto a cardboard chip the size of your thumbnail.

Example: The Imperial Battlecruiser *Oppressive* (Laser Cannon Strength 80) fires upon the Valiant Rebel Ship *Desdemona's Hanky* (Laser Shield Strength 25). 80 minus 25 equals 55, and the *Oppressive* has a fifty-five percent chance of piercing the Rebel shields and making the universe safe for autocracy. A pair of special dice might be rolled to generate a random number from 1 to 100, or numbered tiles drawn from a cup. (In case you're worried, the Imperial dice roll was a 20. Since 20 is within the required range of 01-55, the shot penetrates. That'll teach 'em to mess with the Empire.)

This emphasis on probabilities is the next important element. In non-CS games, dice are used to control movement (or for their own sake, as in Craps). In the CS game, movement is usually governed by fixed rules and not subject to chance; but other events are assigned a probability of occurring, and some system, almost always the roll of dice, used to find the outcome.

Does this make the CS game a game of chance? Not at all. In a properly constructed game the players' decisions are the important element. Random factors are present to reflect those things that in real life throw off even the most carefully considered decisions; fate, the unforeseen, and the basic cussedness of the Universe.

"God does not play dice," said Dr. Einstein *contra* Dr. Heisenberg, but time has shown the Uncertainty Principle valid nonetheless.

Now that there is a structure of rules that mimics real-life decisions and events, board and pieces can sometimes be dispensed with entirely or reduced to simple recording devices, like tote boards. There are three types of games in this group:

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The "diplomatic" games involve several players, usually five to seven, in a negotiating situation, often a pie being sliced without enough pieces to go around. The first and classic such game is *Diplomacy,* published by The Avalon Hill Co. *Diplomacy,* which deals with pre-World War I political-military maneuvering, is not strictly an SF game (calling it an alternate-universe game is stretching points) but its remarkably simple and elegant game system has been applied to SF and fantasy situations, notably Middle-Earth.

A game of *Diplomacy* begins with seven players, representing the Great Powers of Europe in the year 1901. Only one of those players can win the game, by being the last nation with armies and fleets on the board/map of Europe. And in the beginning no single nation has sufficient military power to conquer another nation single-handed. Coalitions are necessary. And when a four- or five-way coalition has eliminated its enemies, the members turn on each other.

When played face-to-face (rather than by mail) a *Diplomacy* turn consists of fifteen minutes of more-or-less private negotiation, during which promises of military aid, mutual support, and nonaggression are made, followed by five minutes in which actual orders are written. Then the pieces are moved according to those written orders—and there is absolutely no obligation in the rules to actually do anything you promised to do.

"Moderated" games are played by groups of people, often widely scattered, who mail or telephone their moves to an umpire, or "Gamesmaster." The Gamesmaster collects the moves, determines the interaction and reaction that results, and mails/calls the results back. Because of the long wait between turns—two weeks to a month—moderated games tend to be big in scope: the players manage vast interstellar empires, great fleets of starships. A game typically runs more than a year. A good many are run on computers. (*Diplomacy,* it should be noted, is widely played by mail, with Gamesmasters. Such is the difficulty of drawing sharp lines and making absolute statements about the games field.)

"Rôle-playing" games are a different sort of creature than anything else discussed here. In the rôle-play, or *adventure,* games (of which TSR Games' *Dungeons and Dragons* is far and away the best known) a Gamesmaster player "creates" a science-fiction or fantasy environment by drawing maps and populating it with humans, aliens, and mythical monsters. Then, one to a dozen players assume the personalities of characters in this landscape;

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dragonslayers, space pirates, traders and wizards and all the other types of adventurer—but a proper discussion of this unusual sort of game will have to wait for another article.

IN THE MIND

Board and pieces and rules and chance, we have now; but what do they all *mean*?

They mean that instead of Knight to King's Bishop 7 Check, the corrupt Terran Empire assaults the Human/Ythri planet Avalon. Instead of Go to Jail, Go Directly to Jail, the Ringbearer is wounded by a Nazgûl blade. Instead of a flush beating a straight, the superdreadnought *Chicago* gives a Boskonian battlecruiser one across her bows with a Space Patrol Primary Beam.

Oh, do they really?, the naturally skeptical reader asks of the burbling essayist. Yes, they do. Having shown something of the *what* and *how* of SF games, I will talk a bit about *why*.

People read fiction for entertainment—though "entertainment" is one more of those words we grasp at quicksilver to define. They read *science fiction* for a special sort of entertainment; three things in particular.

One: Suspense, surprise, and dramatic tension—the requirements of all literature. And of all games; anyone who has played any game at all, volleyball, checkers, three-card monte, will understand this.

Two: Stimulation of thought. Again, all great literature does this, but SF, being designed around ideas and novel thought patterns, does it with a special facility. The games fill this requirement in two ways. First, they demand an active involvement from the player; one has to be *doing* something, or one cannot properly be said to be playing. Second, the "might-be" possibilities of a game ask for hard thought about patterns and relationships. *What if* Marshal Ney gets to Waterloo on time? *What if* Japan is invaded on land, and the atomic bomb never used? *What if*?—which is, after all, the key premise of all science fiction.

Three: Creation of a "secondary universe" that captures the interest of the observer. Asimov's steel-cave cities, Smith's Instrumentality, Varley's Eight Worlds; these places take on a life of their own, are seen through the words on the page as living, illuminated entities. The people of Bradley's Darkover sometimes seem more real than the people we know. For games, much the same features apply. For the span of the game, as of the story or novel, the Confederacy won its separation from the Union, and

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now the Union is fighting (with the new inventions the tank and the aëroplane!) to reunify America; now Cletus Grahame's Dorsai are fighting Dow deCastries's Coalition Army at improbable odds; now the Council of Lectors on overcrowded Angouleme fight an expansionist war on other worlds and bread riots on their own.

And there is a fourth factor to the attraction of the games: they play differently, every time.

Only a very few books and stories are of sufficient quality to bear rereading and re-rereading; only the best can provide the feeling of continual newness (like *Hamlet,* with its infinity of hidden facets) or of revisiting well-remembered friends (like *The Lord of the Rings*).

A game cannot help but be different. The dice roll in a new way each time; opponents change, or the same opponents change their style. Each time a game is played, it is a new book. The cast and the stage may be familiar, the plot old, but the story and the twists and especially the ending are waiting to be acted out for the first time.

OFF THE WALL

Supposing I've hooked your interest in games, what next? How does one begin?

Back to chess for an analogy. By far the best way to start is to be shown how by an experienced player—"gamer" is the favored term. And where to find one? Ask. Most science fiction fan groups have a few dedicated players. Many colleges and a number of large cities have organized clubs, which are usually eager (sometimes desperate) for new members. Ask at a hobby shop or bookstore that sells games; a number of these (especially the hobby shops) maintain Opponents Wanted bulletin boards.

If you're still stymied, or physically isolated, there's the Socratic-dialogue system: Purchase a game and examine its rules with the help of an agreeable friend. (The friend will be more help than you might think. Besides, you're going to need someone to play against.)

Which game? If you can find a gamers' group you can probably get a look at several and advice on even more. Barring this, read the manufacturer's literature, and (again) ask, at the hobby shop or bookstore. Box copy ranges from clear and helpful to nonexistent. Simulations Publications Inc. prints a "Complexity Rating" on a 1-to-9 scale on all its games; so have some other publishers. Avalon Hill rates all its games in its catalog.

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Avalon Hill's *Starship Troopers* (from the novel, and officially authorized by Robert A. Heinlein) uses a "Programmed-Learning" rulebook that teaches game concepts in small, digestible sections that build up to a quite sophisticated game system featuring *everything* found in the book. Unfortunately, Programmed Texts are not easy to write, and (at this writing) *Starship Troopers* is the only SF game using the technique.

One more source of information is the magazines dealing directly with gaming (see the Appendix to this article). Be forewarned; these tend to be written in just that insider's dialect I mentioned early on, and their game reviews are often highly subjective (not to mention from the viewpoint of already-experienced gamers). But once involved with the hobby, they are valuable for variants and clarifications of existing games and announcements and descriptions of new ones.

The mention of new games is important as well, because the field is growing and changing rapidly—*exploding* is not too strong a word. Five years ago there were essentially *no* professionally published SF games; now there are dozens, and more being announced every day. Whole game companies have sprung up devoted solely to SF/fantasy games. Did someone mention the Great Science Fiction Boom?

Finally, how many readers of science fiction have also considered becoming writers of science fiction? (The editor of this magazine, from behind a mountain of manuscripts, will tell you that most of them have.) Gaming SF offers many of the pleasures of creation—*you* plot the story, *you* make the decisions—and all without the fear of rejection. Well, you *can* lose, of course. But as with any good writer, next time's another story . . . next time the other fellow won't be expecting me to . . . next time I'll get him. . . .

It's your move.

FANTASY AND SCIENCE FICTION GAME PUBLISHERS

Aside from this (short) list, see the advertisements throughout this magazine. (And when writing, please mention where you heard about them.)

The Avalon Hill Game Company

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4517 Harford Road, Baltimore MD 21214
Publishes mostly historical (non-SF) games, a notable exception being *Starship Troopers*. Also publishes *The General,* a bimonthly magazine on its own games.

Fantasy Games Unlimited
Box 182, Roslyn NY 11576
Primarily fantasy games, some SF.

Flying Buffalo Incorporated
Box 1467, Scottsdale AZ 85252
Moderates *StarWeb,* a computerized, by-mail interstellar empire game (the largest such operation going.) Also publishes some SF/fantasy games and game material.

Game Designer's Workshop
203 North St., Normal IL 62525
One of the first publishers in the SF field with *Triplanetary*. Their *Traveller* is considered by some to be the best SF role-playing game on the market.

Lou Zocchi and Associates
1513 Newton, Biloxi MS 39532
Sells an enormous number of games, and publishes several, including an authorized *Star Trek Starfleet Battle Manual.*

Metagaming
Box 15346, Austin TX 78761
Exclusively SF/fantasy. Publishes "Microgames," pocketsized, uncomplicated games selling for $3–$4. Magazine: *The Space Gamer.*

Simulations Publications Inc.
44 East 23rd St., New York NY 10010
The largest line of conflict simulation games in the world. SF line growing rapidly. Magazines: *Strategy & Tactics,* which includes a complete game in each issue, and *Moves,* game analysis and design.

TSR Games
Box 756, Lake Geneva WI 53147
Best known for *Dungeons and Dragons,* also publishes a line of SF/fantasy games and rulebooks, including *Lankhmar* by Harry

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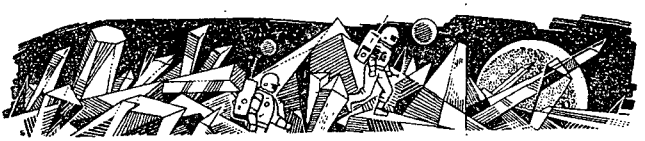
Fischer and Fritz Leiber. Magazine: *The Dragon.*

The Chaosium
Box 6302, Albany CA 94706
Exclusively fantasy games. Magazine: *Wyrm's Footnotes.*



A THIRD SOLUTION TO THE THREE ROBOTS OF PROFESSOR TINKER
(from page 77)

Say to any robot: "If I were to ask each of you whether you are male or female, and your two companions gave the same answer, would your answer agree with theirs?"

The truther would have to say no, the liar would have to say yes, and the sometimer would be unable to reply because she knows that her companions (one a truther, the other a liar) could not give the same answer. By directing this curious question toward any two robots, their identities are established and you will know the identity of the third.

"I must admit," said Isomorph, "that the sometimer could answer yes or no, and either answer would be, in a vague sense, a lie. But I assume that the question would at least cause the sometimer to think a long time before answering, if at all. Therefore I maintain this is a legitimate two-question solution to the first problem."

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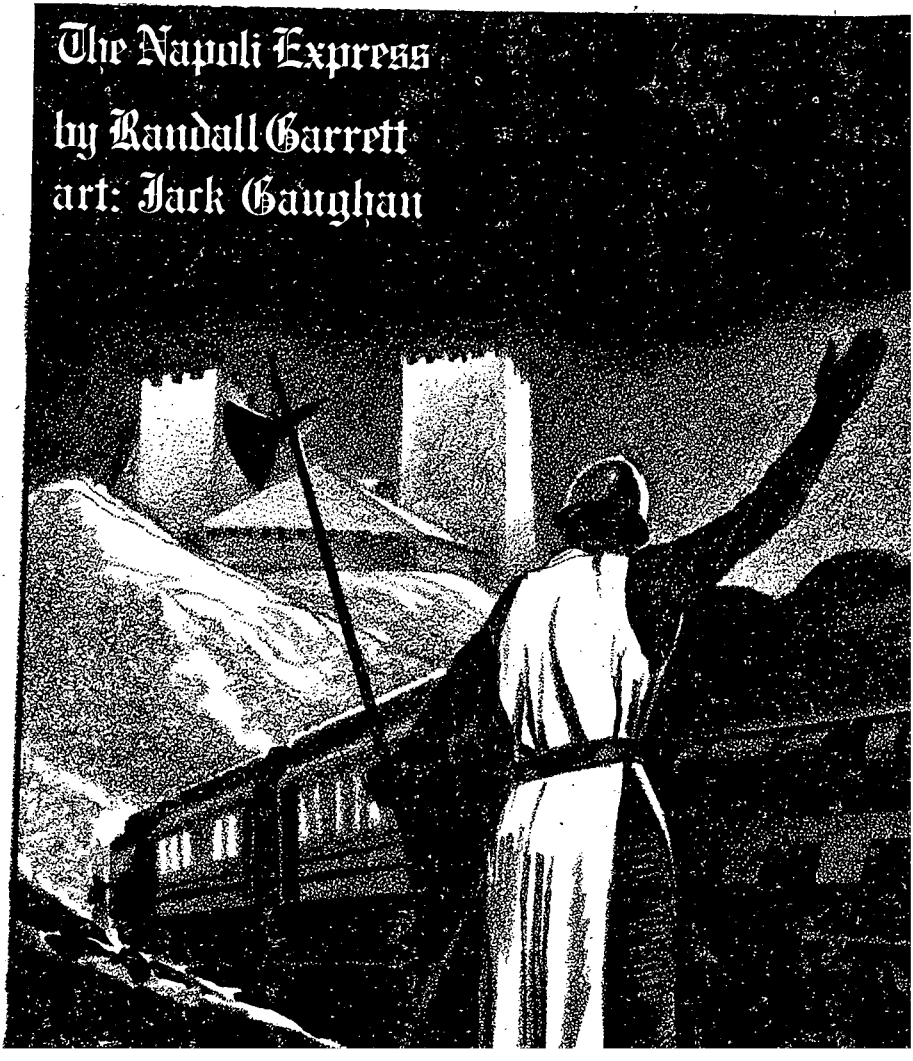
The Napoli Express

by Randall Garrett

art: Jack Gaughan



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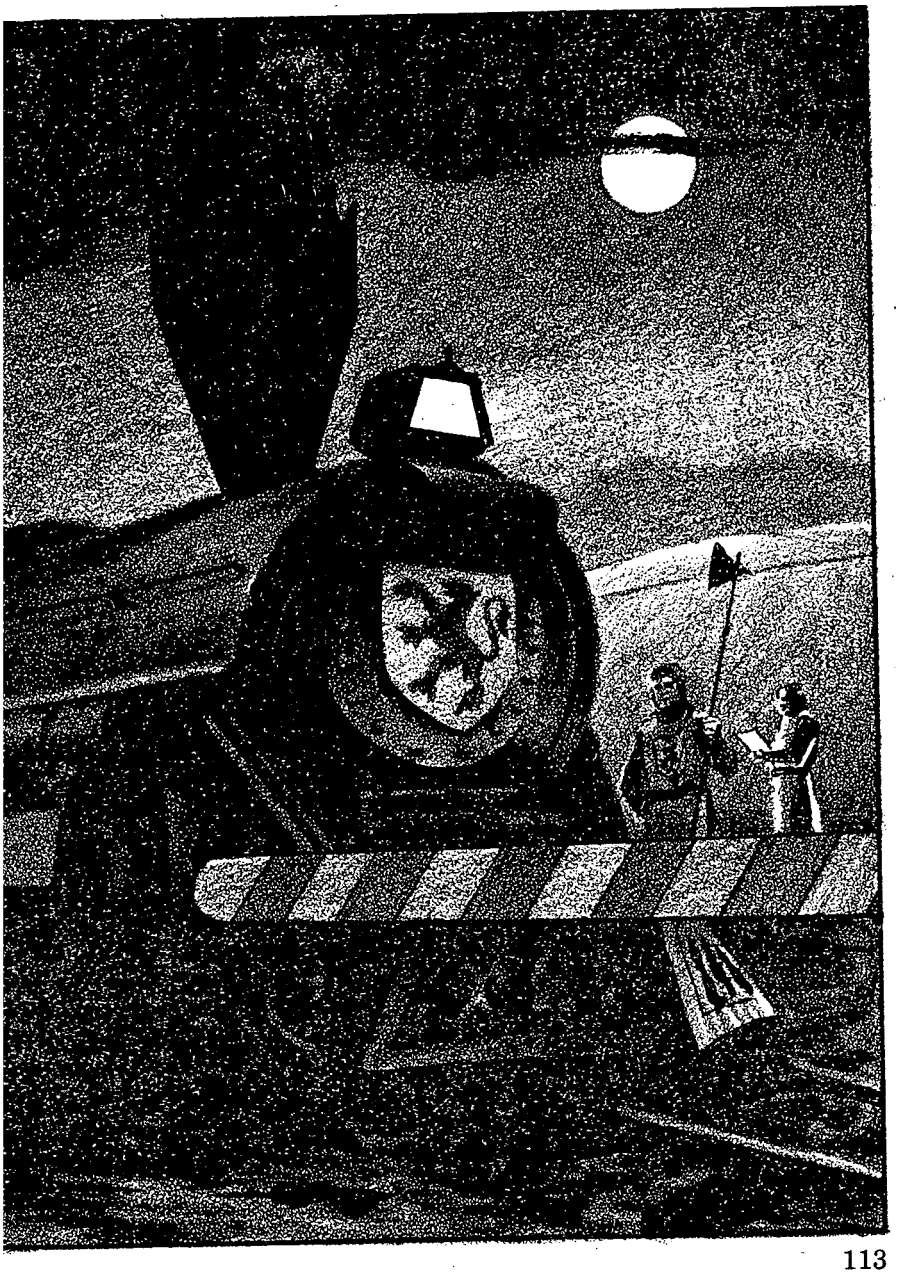

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Be warned: Lord Darcy's world is not quite like our own: the Plantagenets rule both France and England, magic is a science, and our tale is not *set on the* Orient Express.

I

His Royal Highness, Prince Richard, Duke of Normandy, seated on the edge of his bed in the Ducal Palace at Rouen, had taken off one boot and started on the other when a discreet rap came at the door.

"Yes? What is it?" There was the sound of both weariness and irritation in his voice.

"Sir Leonard, Highness. I'm afraid it's important."

Sir Leonard was the Duke's private secretary and general factotum. If he said something was important, it was. Nevertheless—

"Come in, then, but damn it, man, it's five o'clock in the morning! I've had a hard day and no sleep."

Sir Leonard knew all that, so he ignored it. He came through the door and stopped. "There is a Commander Dhuglas downstairs, Highness, with a letter from His Majesty. It is marked *Most Urgent.*"

"Oh. Well, let's see it."

"The Commander was instructed to deliver it into your hands only, Highness."

"Bother," said His Highness without rancor, and put his boot back on.

By the time he got downstairs to the room where Commander Dhuglas was waiting, Prince Richard no longer looked either tired or disheveled. He was every inch a tall, blond, handsome Plantagenet, member of a proud family that had ruled the Anglo-French Empire for over eight centuries.

Commander Dhuglas, a spare man with graying hair, bowed when the Duke entered. "Your Highness."

"Good morning, Commander. I understand you have a letter from His Majesty."

"I do, Your Highness." The naval officer handed over a large, ornately sealed envelope. "I am to wait for an answer, Your Highness."

His Highness took the letter and waved toward a nearby chair. "Sit down, Commander, while I see what this is all about."

He himself took another chair, broke the seal on the envelope

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and took out the letter.

At the top was the embossed seal of the Royal Arms, and, below that:

My dear Richard,

There has been a slight change in plans. Due to unforeseen events at this end, the package you have prepared for export must go by sea instead of overland. The bearer of this letter, Commander Edwy Dhuglas, will take it and your courier to their destination aboard the vessel he commands, the White Dolphin. *She's the fastest ship in the Navy, and will make the trip in plenty of time.*

All my best,
Your loving brother,
John

Prince Richard stared at the words. The "package" to which His Majesty referred was a freshly negotiated and signed naval treaty between Kyril, the emperor at Constantinople, and King John. If the treaty could be gotten to Athens in time, Kyril would take steps immediately to close the Sea of Marmora against certain Polish "merchant" vessels—actually disguised light cruisers—which King Casimir's navy was building in Odessa. If those ships got out, Casimir of Poland would have naval forces in the Mediterranean and the Atlantic for the first time in forty years. The treaty with the Scandinavians, at the end of the 1939 war, had stopped the Poles from getting out of the Baltic, but the treaty with the Greeks at that time had had holes in it.

The present treaty closed those holes, but Kyril would not act until the signed treaty was in his hands. There were three of the disguised cruisers in the Black Sea now; once they got past the Dardanelles, it would be too late. They had to be trapped in the Sea of Marmora, and that meant the treaty had to be in Athens within days.

Plans had been laid, timetables set and mathematically calculated to get that treaty there with all possible haste.

And now, His Imperial Majesty, John IV, by the Grace of God King of England, France, Scotland, and Ireland; Emperor of the Romans and Germans; Premier Chief of the Moqtessumid Clan; Son of the Sun; Lord and Protector of the Western Continents of New England and New France; Defender of the Faith, had changed those plans. He had every right to do so, of course; there was no question of that. But—

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Prince Richard looked at his wristwatch and then at Commander Dhuglas. "I am afraid this message from the King my brother is a little late, Commander. The item to which he refers should be leaving Paris on the *Napoli Express* in five minutes."

II

The long, bright-red cars of the *Napoli Express* seemed almost eager to get into motion; the two ten-inch-wide stripes along their length—one white and one blue—almost gave the impression that they were already in motion. Far down the track ahead, nearly outside the South Paris Station, the huge engine steamed with a distant hissing.

As usual, the *Express* was loaded nearly full. She only made the run from Paris to Napoli twice a week, and she usually had all the passengers she could handle—plus a standby waiting list.

The trouble with being a standby is that when a reservation is cancelled at the last moment, the standbys, in order of precedence, have to take the accommodations offered or give them up to the next in line.

The poshest compartments on the *Napoli Express* are the eight double compartments on the last car of the train, the Observation Car, which is separated from the rest of the train by the dining car. All sixteen places had been reserved, but three of them had been cancelled at the last moment. Two of them had been filled by standbys who rather reluctantly parted with the extra fare required, but the sixteenth place remained empty. None of the other standbys could afford it.

The passengers were filing aboard. One of them—a short, stout, dark-haired, well-dressed Irishman carrying a symbol-decorated carpetbag in one hand and a suitcase in the other, and bearing papers which identified him as Seamus Kilpadraeg, Master Sorcerer—watched the other passengers carefully without seeming to do so. The man just ahead of him in line was a wide-shouldered, thick-set man with graying hair who announced himself as Sir Stanley Galbraith. He climbed aboard and did not look back as Master Seamus identified himself, put down his suitcase, surrendered his ticket, and took back his stub.

The man behind him, the last in line, was a tall, lean gentleman with brown hair and a full, bushy brown beard. Master Seamus had previously watched him hurrying across the station toward the train. He carried a suitcase in one hand and a silver-headed walking stick in the other, and walked with a slight limp.

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The sorcerer heard him give his name to the ticket officer as Goodman John Peabody.

Master Seamus knew that the limp was phony and that the walking stick concealed a sword, but he said nothing and did not look back as he picked up his suitcase and boarded the train.

The small lounge at the rear of the car already contained some five or six passengers. The rest were presumably in their compartments. His own compartment, according to his ticket, was Number Two, towards the front of the car. He headed toward it, suitcase in one hand, carpetbag in the other. He looked again at the ticket: Number Two Upper. The lower bed was now a day couch, the upper had been folded up into the wall and locked into place, but there were two lockers under the lower bed marked "Upper" and "Lower". The one marked "Upper" still had a key in its lock; the other did not, which meant that the man who shared his compartment had already put his luggage in, locked it, and taken the key. Master Seamus stowed his own gear away, locked the locker, and pocketed the key. Having nothing better to do, he went back to the lounge.

The bushy-bearded man named Peabody was seated by himself over in one corner reading the Paris *Standard*. After one glance, the sorcerer ignored him, found himself a seat, and looked casually around at the others.

They seemed a mixed lot, some tall, some short, some middle-aged, some not much over thirty. The youngest-appearing was a blond, pink-faced fellow who was standing by the bar as if impatiently awaiting a drink, although he must have known that liquor would not be served until the train was well under way.

The oldest-appearing was a white-haired gentleman in priest's garb; he had a small white mustache and beard, and smooth-shaven cheeks. He was quietly reading his breviary through a pair of gold-rimmed half-glasses.

Between those two, there seemed to be a sampling of every decade. There were only nine men in the lounge, including the sorcerer. Five others, for one reason or another, remained in their compartments. The last one almost didn't make it.

He was a plump man—not really fat, but definitely overweight—who came puffing up just as the ticket officer was about to close the door. He clutched his suitcase in one hand and his hat in the other. His sandy hair had been tousled by the warm spring wind.

"Quinte," he gasped. "Jason Quinte." He handed over his ticket,

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retaining the stub.

The ticket officer said, "Glad you made it, sir. That's all, then." And he closed the door.

Two minutes later, the train began to move.

III

Five minutes out of the station, a man in a bright red-and-blue uniform came into the car and asked those who were in their staterooms to please assemble in the after lounge. "The Trainmaster will be here in a moment," he informed everyone.

In due time, the Trainmaster made his appearance in the lounge. He was a man of medium height, with a fierce-looking black mustache, and when he doffed his hat, he revealed a vast expanse of bald head fringed by black hair. His red-and-blue uniform was distinguished from the other by four broad white stripes on each sleeve.

"Gentlemen," he said with a slight bow, "I am Edmund Norton, your Trainmaster. I see by the passenger manifest that all of you are going straight through to Napoli. The timetable is printed on the little cards inside the doors of your compartments, and another one—" he gestured "—is posted over there behind the bar. Our first stop will be Lyon, where we will arrive at 12:15 this afternoon, and there will be an hour stopover. There is an excellent restaurant at the station for your lunch. We arrive at Marseille at 6:24 and will leave at 7:20. There will be a light supper served in the dining car at nine.

"At approximately half an hour after midnight, we will cross the border from the Duchy of Provence to the Duchy of Liguria. The train will stop for ten minutes, but you need not bother yourselves with that, as no one will be allowed either on or off the train. We will arrive at Genova at 3:31 in the morning, and leave at 4:30. Breakfast will be served from 8 to 9 in the morning, and we arrive in Rome at four minutes before noon. We leave Rome at one o'clock, which will give you an hour for lunch. And we arrive at Napoli at 3:26 in the afternoon. The total time for the trip will be 34 hours and 14 minutes.

"For your convenience, the dining car will be open this morning at six. It is the next car ahead, toward the front of the train.

"Goodman Fred will take care of all of your needs, but feel free to call on me for anything at any time." Goodman Fred made a short bow.

"I must remind you, gentlemen, that smoking is not permitted

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in the compartments, in the corridor, or in the lounge. Those of you who wish to smoke may use the observation platform at the rear of the car.

"If there are any questions, I will be glad to answer them at this time."

There were no questions. The Trainmaster bowed again. "Thank you, gentlemen. I hope you will all enjoy your trip." He replaced his hat, turned, and left.

There were four tables reserved in the rear of the dining car for the occupants of the observation car. Master Sorcerer Seamus Kilpadraeg got into the dining car early, and one by one, three other men sat down with him at the table.

The tall, husky man with the receding white hair and the white, clipped, military mustache introduced himself first.

"Name's Martyn Boothroyd. Looks like we're going to be on the train together for a while, eh?" His attention was all on the sorcerer.

"So it would seem, Goodman Martyn," the stout little Irish sorcerer said affably. "Seamus Kilpadraeg I am, and pleased to meet you."

The blocky-faced man with the two-inch scar on his right cheek was Gavin Tailleur; the blond man with the big nose was Sidney Charpentier.

The waiter came, took orders, and went.

Charpentier rubbed a forefinger against the side of his imposing nose. "Pardon me, Goodman Seamus," he said in his deep, rumbling voice, "but when you came aboard, didn't I see you carrying a magician's bag?"

"You did, sir," said the sorcerer pleasantly.

Charpentier grinned, showing strong white teeth. "Thought so. Journeyman? Or should I have called you 'Master Seamus'?"

The Irishman smiled back. "Master it is, sir."

All of them were speaking rather loudly, and around them others were doing the same, trying to adjust their voice levels to compensate for the roar and rumble of the *Napoli Express* as she sped southwards towards Lyon.

"It's a pleasure to make your acquaintance, Master Seamus," Charpentier said. "I've always been interested in the field of magic. Sometimes wish I'd gone into it, myself. Never have made Master, though; math's way over my head."

"Oh? You've a touch of the Talent, then?" the sorcerer asked.

"A little. I've got my ticket as a Lay Healer."

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The sorcerer nodded. A Lay Healer's License was good for first aid and emergency work or for assisting a qualified Healer.

The blocky-faced Tailleur tapped the scar on his cheek with his right forefinger and said, in a somewhat gravelly voice: "This would've been a damn sight worse than it is if it hadn't been for old Sharpy, here."

Boothroyd said suddenly: "There's a question I've always wanted to ask—oops, here's breakfast." While the waiter put plates of hot food on the table, Boothroyd began again. "There's a question I've always wanted to ask. I've noticed that Healers use only their hands, with perhaps a little oil or water, but sorcerers use all kinds of paraphernalia—wands, amulets, thuribles, that sort of thing. Why is that?"

"Well, sir, for one thing, they're slightly different uses of the Talent," the sorcerer said. "A Healer is assisting in a process that naturally tends in the direction he wants it to go. The body itself has a strong tendency to heal. Furthermore, the *patient* wants it to heal, except in certain cases of severe aberration, which a Healer can take care of in other ways."

"In other words," Charpentier said, "the Healer has the co-operation of both the body and the mind of the patient."

"Exactly so," the sorcerer agreed. "The Healer just greases the skids, so to speak."

"And how does that differ from what a sorcerer does?" Boothroyd asked.

"Well, most of a sorcerer's work is done with inanimate objects. No cooperation at all, d'ye see. So he has to use tools that a Healer doesn't need.

"I'll give you an analogy. Suppose you have two friends who weigh fourteen stone apiece. Suppose they're both very drunk and want to go home. But they are so drunk that they can't get home by themselves. You, who are perfectly sober, can take 'em both by the arm and lead 'em both home at the same time. It may be a bit o' trouble; it may require all your skill at handling 'em. But you can do it without help because, in the long run, they're co-operating with you. They *want* to get home.

"But suppose you had the same weight in two sandbags, and you want to get *them* to the same place at the same time. You'll get no co-operation from three hundred and ninety-two pounds of sand. So you have to use a tool to assist you. You have a great many tools, but you must pick the right one for the job. In this case, you'd use a wheelbarrow, not a screwdriver or a hammer."

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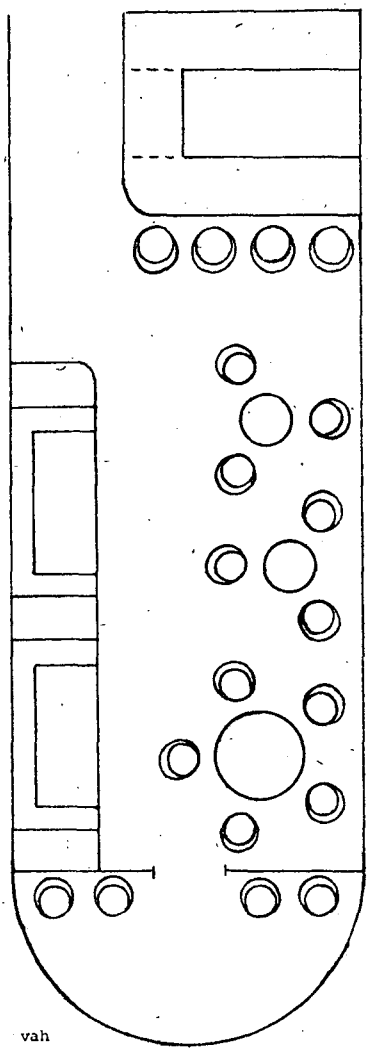
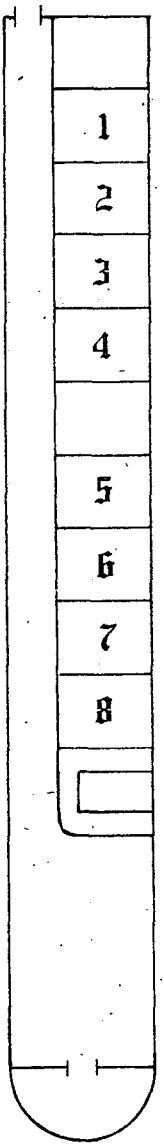
Observation Car of the Napoli Express





UTILITY ROOM

1 JOHN PEABODY

2 FATHER ARMAND BRUN
MASTER SEAMUS KILPADRAEG

3 MAURICE ZEISLER
SIDNEY CHARPENTIER

4 MARTYN BOOTHROYD
GAVIN TAILLEUR

TOILET

5 SIMON LAMAR
ARTHUR MAC KAY

6 VALENTINE HERRICK
CHARLES JAMIESON

7 JASON QUINTE
LYMAN VANDEPOLE

8 SIR STANLEY GALBRAITH
GWILIAM HAUSER

BAR

LOUNGE —
(DETAIL AT LEFT)

OBSERVATION DECK

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"Oh, I see," said Boothroyd. "You'd say a healer's job was easier, then?"

"Not easier. Just different. Some men who could wheel twenty-eight stone of sand a mile in fifteen minutes might not be able to handle a couple of drunks at all without using physical force. It's a different approach, you see."

Master Seamus had let his eyes wander over the other men in the rear of the dining car as he talked. There were only fourteen men at breakfast. The white-haired priest was listening to two rather foppish-looking men discourse earnestly on church architecture at the next table. He couldn't hear any of the others because of the noise of the train. Only one man was missing. Apparently the bushy-bearded Goodman John Peabody had not wanted any breakfast.

IV

The saba game started early.

An imposing man with a hawk nose and a full beard, completely white except for two narrow streaks of dark brown beginning at the corners of his mouth, came over to where Master Seamus was sitting in the lounge.

"Master Seamus, I'm Gwiliam Hauser. A few of us are getting up a little game and thought maybe you'd like to join us."

"I thank you for the offer, Goodman Gwiliam," the sorcerer said, "but I'm afraid I'm not much of a gambling man."

"Hardly gambling, sir. Twelfth-bit ante. Just a friendly game to pass the time."

"No, not even a friendly game of saba. But, again, I thank you."

Hauser's eyes narrowed. "May I ask why not?"

"Ah, that you may, sir, and I'll tell you. If a sorcerer gets in a saba game with men who don't have the Talent, he can only lose."

"And why is that?"

"Because if he wins, sir, there's sure to be someone at the table who will accuse him of using his Talent to cheat. Now you should see a saba game played among sorcerers, sir. That's something to watch, though likely you'd not see most of what was going on."

Hauser's eyes cleared, and a chuckle came from somewhere inside the heavy beard. "I see. Hadn't thought of it that way. Boothroyd said you might like to play, so I asked. I'll pass on your bit of wisdom to him."

Actually, it would never occur to most folk to distrust a magician, much less accuse one of cheating at cards. But a heavy loser,

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especially if he's been drinking, will quite often say things he regrets later. Sorcerers rarely gamble with unTalented people unless they are close friends.

Eventually Hauser, Boothroyd, Charpentier, the plump, nearly-late Jason Quinte, and one of the two fops—the tall one with the hairline mustache, who looked as though he had been pressed into his clothes—ended up at a corner table with a deck of cards and a round of drinks. The saba game was on.

The sorcerer watched the game for a while from across the room, then opened the copy of the *Journal of the Royal Thaumaturgical Society* and began to read.

At eight-fifteen, the Irish magician finished the article on "The Subjective Algebra of Kinetic Processes" and put the *Journal* down. He was tired, not having had enough sleep, and the swaying motion of the train made it difficult to keep his eyes focused on the lines of print. He closed his eyes and massaged the bridge of his nose between thumb and forefinger.

"Beg y'pardon, Master Seamus. Mind if I join you?"

The sorcerer opened his eyes and looked up.

"Not at all. Pray sit down."

The man had reddish hair, a bulbous nose, and sagging features that hung loosely on his facial bones. His smile was pleasant and his eyes sleepy-looking. "Zeisler's my name, Master Seamus. Maurice Zeisler." He extended his right hand; his left held a large glass of ouiskie and water—heavy on the ouiskie.

The two shook hands, and Zeisler eased himself into the chair to the sorcerer's left. He gestured toward the saba table.

"Damn silly game, saba. Have to remember all those cards. Miss one, play wrong, and you're down the drain for a sovereign at least. Remember 'em all, have all the luck, bluff all the others out, and you're four sovereigns ahead. I never get the luck, and I can't keep the cards straight. Vandepole can, every time. So I stand 'em all a round of drinks and let 'em play. Lose less that way."

"Very wise," murmured the sorcerer.

"Buy you a drink?"

"No, thank you, sir. It's a bit early for me. Later, perhaps."

"Certainly. Be a pleasure." He took a hefty swig from his glass and then leaned confidentially toward the sorcerer. "What I would really like to know is, *is* Vandepole cheating? He's the well-dressed chap with the hairline mustache. Is he using the Talent to influence the fall of the cards?"

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The sorcerer didn't even glance at the saba table. "Are you consulting me professionally, sir?" he asked in a mild voice.

Zeisler blinked. "Well, I—"

"Because, if you are," Master Seamus continued relentlessly, "I must warn you that a Master's fees come quite high. I would suggest you consult a Journeyman Sorcerer for that sort of thing; his fees would be much lower than mine, and he'd give you the same information."

"Oh. Well. Thank you. I may do that. Thank you." He took another long pull at his drink. "Uh—by the bye, do you happen to know a Master Sorcerer named Sean O Lochlainn?"

The sorcerer nodded slowly. "I've met him," he said carefully.

"Fortunate. Never met him, myself, but I've heard a great deal about him. Forensic sorcerer, you know. Interesting work. Like to meet him sometime." His eyes had wandered away from the sorcerer as he spoke, and he was gazing out the window at the French countryside flowing by.

"You're interested in magic, then?" the Irishman asked.

Zeisler's eyes came back. "Magic? Oh, no. Got no Talent at all. No, what I'm interested in is investigative work. Criminal investigation." He blinked and frowned as though trying to remember something. Then his eyes brightened and he said: "Reason I brought up Master Sean was that I met the man he works for, Lord Darcy, who's the Chief Investigator for His Royal Highness, the Duke of Normandy." He leaned forward and lowered his voice. The ouiskie was strong on his breath. "Were you at the Healers' and Sorcerers' Convention in London some years back, when a sorcerer named Zwinge got murdered at the Royal Steward Hotel?"

"I was there," the sorcerer said. "I remember it well."

"I imagine so, yes. Well, I was attached to the Admiralty offices at the time. Met Darcy there." He winked an eye solemnly. "Helped him crack the case, actually, but I can't say anything more about it than that." His gaze went back out the window again. "Great investigator. Absolute genius in his field. Nobody else could crack that case, but he solved it in no time. Absolute genius. Wish I had his brains." He drained his glass. "Yes, sir, I wish I had his brains." He looked at his empty glass and stood up. "Time for a refill. Get you one?"

"Not yet. Later, perhaps."

"Be right back." Zeisler headed for the bar.

He did not come back. He got into a conversation with Fred, the

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attendant who was mixing drinks, and forgot about Master Seamus completely, for which the stout little Irish sorcerer was extremely grateful.

He noticed John Peabody, he of the full and bushy beard, was sitting alone at the far end of the long couch, apparently still reading his newspaper, and seemingly so thoroughly engrossed in it that it would be boorish for anyone to speak to him. But the sorcerer knew that the man was keeping at least a part of his attention on the long hallway that ran forward, past the compartments.

Master Seamus looked back at the saba game. The foppishly dressed man with the hairline mustache was raking in sizeable winnings.

If Vandepole were cheating, he was doing it without the aid of the Talent, either latent or conscious; such usage of the Talent would have been easy for the sorcerer to pick up at this short range. It was possible, of course, that the man had a touch of the precognitive Talent, but that was something which the science of magic had, as yet, little data and no theory on. Someone, some day, might solve the problem of the asymmetry of time, but no one had done it yet, and even the relatively new mathematics of the subjective algebrae offered no clue.

The sorcerer shrugged and picked up his *Journal* again. What the hell, it was no business of his.

V

"*Lyon, gentlemen!*" came Goodman Fred's voice across the lounge, fighting successfully against the noise of the train. "*Lyon in fifteen minutes! The bar will close in five minutes! Lunch will be served in the station restaurant, and we will leave at one-fifteen! It is now twelve noon!*"

Fred had everyone's attention now, so he repeated the message.

Not everyone was in the lounge. After the bar was closed—Zeisler had managed to get two more during the five minutes—Fred went forward along the passageway and knocked on each compartment door. "Lyon in ten minutes! Lunch will be served in the station restaurant. We will leave for Marseille at 1:15."

The stout little Irish sorcerer turned in his couch to look out the window at the outskirts of Lyon. It was a pleasant place, he thought. The Rhone valley was famous for its viniculture, but now the grape arbors were giving way to cottages more and more densely packed, and finally the train was in the city itself. The

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houses were old, most of them, but neat and well-tended. Technically, the County of Lyonnais was a part of the Duchy of Burgundy, but the folk never thought of themselves as Burgundians. The Count de Lyonnais commanded their respect far more than the Duke of Burgundy did. His Grace respected those feelings, and allowed My Lord Count as free a hand as the King's Law would permit. From the looks of the countryside, it appeared My Lord Count did a pretty good job.

"Excuse me, Master Sorcerer," said a soft, pleasant voice.

He turned away from the window. It was the elderly-looking gentleman in clerical garb. "How may I help you, Father?"

"Allow me to introduce myself; I am the Reverend Father Armand Brun. I noticed you sitting here by yourself, and I wondered if you would care to join me and some other gentlemen for lunch."

"Master Seamus Kilpadraeg at your service, Reverend Sir. I'd be most happy to join you for lunch. We have an hour, it seems."

The "other gentlemen" were standing near the bar, and were introduced in that quiet, smooth voice. Simon Lamar had thinning dark hair that one could see his scalp through, a long face, and lips that were drawn into a thin line. His voice was flat, with just a touch of Yorkshire in it as he said: "I'm pleased to meet you, Master Seamus."

Arthur Mac Kay's accent was both Oxford and Oxfordshire, and was smooth and well-modulated, like an actor's. He was the other foppishly dressed man—immaculate, as though his clothes had been pressed seconds before. He had dark, thick, slightly wavy hair, luminous brown eyes surrounded by long, dark lashes, and a handsome face that matched. He was almost too pretty.

Valentine Herrick had flaming red hair, an excessively toothy smile, and a body that seemed to radiate health and strength as he shook the sorcerer's hand. "Hate to see a man eat alone, by S'n George! A meal's not a meal without company, is it?"

"Not really," the sorcerer agreed.

"Especially at these train station restaurants," said Lamar in his flat voice. "Company keeps your mind off the tasteless food."

Mac Kay smiled angelically. "Oh, come; it's not as bad as all that. Come along; you'll see."

The Heart of Lyon restaurant was a fairly comfortable-looking place, not more than fifty years old, but designed in the King Dwilliam IV style of the late eighteenth century to give it an air of stability. The decor, however, reflected a mild pun on the restaurant's name—which had probably been carefully chosen for just

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that reason. Over the door, three-quarters life size, legs braced apart, right hand on the pommel of a great naked sword whose point touched the lintel, left arm holding a shield bearing the lions of England, stood the helmed, mail-clad figure of King Richard the Lion-Hearted in polychromed bas-relief. The interior, too, was decorated with knights and ladies of the time of Richard I.

It was fitting. Although most of the first ten years of his reign had been spent in the noble and heroic, but foolish and expensive, fighting of the Third Crusade, he had settled down after his near-fatal wound at the siege of Chaluz to become a really effective ruler. There were some historians who claimed that if Richard had died at Chaluz, a Capet would now be sitting on the throne of the Anglo-French Empire instead of a Plantagenet. But the Capets had died out long ago, as had the unstable cadet branch of the Plantagenets descended from the exiled Prince John, Richard's younger brother. It was Richard and Arthur, the nephew who had succeeded him in 1219, who had held the Anglo-French nation together during those troubled times, and it had been the descendants of King Arthur who had kept it stable through seven and a half centuries.

Old Richard may have had his faults, but he had been a fine king.

"Interesting motif for the decorations," Father Armand said as the waiter led the five men to a table. "And very well done, too."

"Not period, though," Lamar said flatly. "Too realistic."

"Oh, true, true," Father Armand said agreeably. "Not early thirteenth century style at all." He seated himself as the waiter pulled out a chair for him. "It's the painstakingly detailed realism of the late seventeenth, which fits in very well with the style of the rest of the interior. It must have been expensive; there are very few artists nowadays who can or will do that sort of work."

"Agreed, Father," said Lamar. "Workmanship in general isn't what it used to be."

Father Armand chose to ignore that remark. "Now, you take a look up there, at Gwiliam the Marshal—at least I presume it's he; he's wearing the Marshal arms on his surcoat. I'll wager that if you climbed up there on a stepladder and looked closely, you could see the tiny rivets in every link of his mail."

Lamar raised a finger. "And that's not period, either."

Father Armand looked astonished. "Riveted link mail not period for the thirteenth century? Surely, sir—"

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"No, no," Lamar interrupted hastily. "I meant the surcoat with the Marshal arms. Armorial bearings of that sort didn't come in till about a century later."

"You know," said Arthur Mac Kay suddenly, "I've always wondered what I'd look like in one of those outfits. Rather dashing, I think." His actor's voice contrasted strongly with Lamar's flat tones.

Valentine Herrick looked at him, smiling toothily. "Hey! Wouldn't that be great? Imagine! Charging into combat with a broadsword like that! Or rescuing a fair princess! Or slaying a dragon! Or a wicked magician!" He stopped suddenly and actually blushed. "Oops. Sorry, Master Sorcerer."

"That's all right," said Master Seamus mildly. "You may slay all the *wicked* magicians you like. Just don't make any mistakes."

That got a chuckle from everyone, even Herrick.

They looked over their menus, chose and ordered. The food, which the sorcerer thought quite good, came very quickly. Father Armand said grace, and more small talk ensued. Lamar said little about the food, but the wine was not to his exact taste.

"It's a Delacey '69, from just south of Givors. Not a bad year for the reds, but it can't compare with the Monet '69, from a lovely little place a few miles southeast of Beaune."

Mac Kay lifted his glass and seemed to address his remarks to it. "You know, I have always contended that the true connoisseur is to be pitied, for he has trained his taste to such perfection that he enjoys almost nothing. It is, I believe, a corollary of Acipenser's Law, or perhaps a theorem derived therefrom."

Herrick blinked bright blue eyes at him. "What? I don't know what you're talking about, but, by S'n George, *I* think it's damn good wine." He emphasized his point by draining his glass and refilling it from the carafe.

Almost as if he had heard the pouring as a summons, Maurice Zeisler came wandering over to the table. He did not stagger, but there was a controlled precision about his walking and about his speech that indicated a necessity to concentrate in order to do either one properly. He did not sit down.

"Hullo, fellows," he said very carefully. "Did you see who's over in the corner?" There were, of course, four corners to the big room, but a slight motion of his head indicated which one he meant.

It was bushy-bearded John Peabody, eating by himself, his suitcase on the floor beside his chair.

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"What about him?" asked Lamar sourly.

"Know him?"

"No. Kept pretty much to himself. Why?"

"I dunno. Seems familiar, somehow. Like I ought to know him. Can't exactly place him, though. Oh, well." And he wandered off again, back towards the bar, whence he had come.

"Condition he's in, he wouldn't recognize his own mother," muttered Lamar. "Pass the wine, please."

VI

The *Napoli Express* crossed the Rhone at Lyon and headed southwards through the Duchy of Dauphine, toward the Duchy of Provence, following the river valley. At Avignon, it would angle away from the river, southeast toward Marseille, but that wouldn't be until nearly five o'clock.

The *Napoli Express* was not a high-speed train; it was too long and too heavy. But it made up for that by making only four stops between Paris and Napoli. Five, if you counted the very short stop at the Provence-Liguria border.

In order to avoid having to cross the Maritime Alps, the train's route ran along the coast of the Mediterranean after leaving Marseille, past Toulon, Canne, Nice, and Monaco to the Ligurian coast. It looped around the Gulf of Genova to the city of Genova, then stayed with the seacoast all the way to the Tiber, where it turned east to make the short side trip to Rome. There, it crossed the Tiber and headed back toward the sea, staying with the coast all the way to arrive at last at Napoli.

But that would be tomorrow afternoon. There were hundreds of miles and hours of time ahead of her yet.

Master Seamus sat on one of the chairs on the observation deck at the rear of the car and watched the Rhone Valley retreat into the distance. There were four seats on the semicircular observation deck, two on each side of the central door that led into the lounge. The two on the starboard side were occupied by the plump, sandy-haired man who had almost missed the train—Jason Quinte—and the blond, pink-faced young man whose name the sorcerer did not know. Both were smoking cigars and talking in voices that could be heard but not understood above the rush of the wind and the rumble of the wheels over the steel tracks.

Master Seamus had taken the outer of the two remaining chairs, and Father Armand, who was trying valiantly to light his pipe in the gusts that eddied about him, had taken the other.

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When at last the pipe was burning properly, Father Armand leaned back and relaxed.

The door slid open and a fifth man came out, thumbing tobacco into his own pipe, a stubby briar. It was Sir Stanley Galbraith, the wide-shouldered, muscular, graying man who had preceded the sorcerer aboard the train. He ignored the others and went to the high railing that surrounded the observation deck and looked into the distance. Having packed his pipe to his satisfaction, he put away his tobacco pouch and then proceeded to search himself. Finally, he turned around, scowling. The scowl vanished when he saw Father Armand's pipe.

"Ah. Begging your pardon, Reverend Sir, but could I borrow your pipe lighter? Seem to have left my own in my compartment."

"Certainly." Father Armand proffered his lighter, which Sir Stanley promptly made use of. He succeeded in an astonishingly short time and handed the lighter back. "Thank you. My name's Galbraith, Sir Stanley Galbraith."

"Father Armand Brun. I am pleased to meet you, Sir Stanley. This is Master Sorcerer Seamus Kilpadraeg."

"A pleasure, gentlemen, a pleasure." He puffed vigorously at his pipe. "There. She'll stay lit now. Good thing it isn't raining; left my weather pipe at home."

"If you need one, Sir Stanley, let me know." It was the plump Jason Quinte. He and the pink-faced youngster had stopped talking when Sir Stanley had appeared and had been listening. Sir Stanley's voice was not overly loud, but it carried well. "I have a couple of them," Quinte went on. "One of 'em never used. Glad to make you a present of it if you want it."

"No, no. Thanks all the same, but there's no bad weather predicted between here and Napoli." He looked at the sorcerer. "Isn't that right, Master Seamus?"

The sorcerer grinned. "That's what the report said, Sir Stanley, but I couldn't tell you of my own knowledge. Weather magic isn't my field."

"Oh. Sorry. You chaps do all specialize, don't you? What is your specialty, if I may ask?"

"I teach forensic sorcery."

"Ah, I see. Interesting field, no doubt." He shifted his attention as a whiff of smoke came his way. "Jamieson."

The pink-faced youth took the cigar from his mouth and looked alert. "Sir?"

"What the devil is that you're smoking?"

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Jamieson looked down at the cigar in his hand as though he were wondering where the thing had come from and how it had got there. "A Hashtpar, sir."

"Persian tobacco; I thought so." A smile came over his tanned face. "Good Persian is very good; bad Persian—which that is—will probably rot your lungs, my boy. That particular type is cured with some sort of perfume or incense. Reminds me of a whorehouse in Abadan."

There was a sudden awkward pause as it came to the minds of all of them that there was a man of the cloth present.

"Toss it overboard, Jamie," Quinte said in a rather-too-loud voice. "Here, have one of mine."

Jamieson looked at the three-quarters-smoked cigar again, then flipped it over the rail. "No, thanks, Jason. I was through with it anyway. Just thought I'd try one." He looked up at Sir Stanley with a rather sheepish grin. "They were expensive, sir, so I bought one. Just to try it, you see. But you're right—they do smell like the inside of a—uh—Daoist temple."

Sir Stanley chuckled. "Some of the worst habits are the most expensive, son. But, then, so are some of the best."

"What are you smoking, Sir Stanley?" Father Armand asked quietly.

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"This? It's a blend of Balik and Robertian."

"I favor a similar blend, myself. I find Balik the best of Turkish. I alternate with another blend: Balik and Couban."

Sir Stanley shook his head slowly. "Tobacco from the Duchy of Couba is much better suited for cigars, Reverend Sir. The Duchy of Robertia produces the finer pipe tobacco, I find. Of course, I'll admit it's all a matter of taste."

"Never seen Couba," said Quinte, "but I've seen the tobacco fields in Robertia. Don't know if you've ever seen the stuff grow, Father?" It was only half a question.

"Tell me about it," said Father Armand.

Robertia was a duchy on the southern coast of the northern continent of the Western Hemisphere, New England, with a seacoast on the Gulf of Mechicoe. It had been named after Robert II, since it had been founded during his reign in the early eighteenth century.

"It grows about so high," Quinte said, holding his hand about thirty inches off the deck. "Big, wide leaves. I don't know how it's cured; I only saw it in the fields."

He may have been going to say more, but the door leading into the lounge slid open and Trainmaster Edmund Norton stepped out, his red-and-blue uniform gleaming in the afternoon sun.

"Good afternoon, gentlemen," he said with a smile. "I hope I'm not interrupting."

"Oh, no," said Sir Stanley. "Not at all. Just chit-chat."

"I hope you gentlemen have all been comfortable, enjoying the trip, eh?"

"No complaints at all, Trainmaster. Eh, Father?"

"Oh, none at all, none at all," said Father Armand. "A very enjoyable trip so far. You run an excellent train, Trainmaster."

"Thank you, Reverend Sir." The Trainmaster cleared his throat. "Gentlemen, it is my custom at this hour to invite all my special passengers to join me in a drink—of whatever kind you prefer. Will you join me, gentlemen?"

There could, of course, be no argument with an invitation like that. The five passengers followed the Trainmaster into the lounge.

"One thing I'll say," Father Armand murmured to the sorcerer, "It's certainly quieter in here than out there."

The Trainmaster went quietly over to the table where the saba game had resumed after lunch. He had judged his time accurately.

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Vandepole raked in his winnings with one hand, while he ran the forefinger of the other across his hairline mustache.

The Trainmaster said a few words, which the sorcerer did not hear over the rumble of the train. It was quieter in here, yes, but not exactly silent.

Then Trainmaster Edmund went over to the bar, where Goodman Fred stood waiting, turned to the passengers and said in a loud voice: "Gentlemen, step up and order your pleasure. Fred, I'll see what the gentlemen at the saba table will have."

A few minutes later, the Irish sorcerer was seated at the bar watching the foam on a glass of beer slosh gently from side to side with the swaying of train. Maurice Zeisler, he thought, was going to hate himself later. The scar-faced Gavin Tailleur had gone back to his compartment to tell him that the Trainmaster was treating, but had been unable to rouse him from his—er—nap.

Master Seamus was seated at the end of the bar, near the passageway. The Trainmaster came over and stood at the end of the bar after making sure everyone who wanted one had been served a drink.

"I'll have a beer, Fred," he said to the attendant.

"Comin' right up, Trainmaster."

"I see beer's your tipple, too, Master Sorcerer," Trainmaster Edmund said as Fred put a foaming brew before him.

"Aye, Trainmaster, that it is. Wine's good with a meal, and a brandy for special occasions is fine, but for casual or even serious drinkin', I'll take beer every time."

"Well spoken. Do you like this particular brew?"

"Very much," said the sorcerer. "Norman, isn't it?"

"Yes. There's a little area in the Duchy of Normandy, up in the highlands where the Orne, the Sarthe, the Eure, the Risle, and the Mayenne all have their sources, that has the best water in all of France. There's a good beer comes from Ireland, and there are those who prefer English beer, but to my taste, Norman is the best, which is why I always order it for my train."

Master Seamus, who *did* prefer English beer, but by the merest hair, merely said: "It's very fine stuff. Very fine, indeed." He suspected that the Trainmaster's preference might be shaded just a little by the fact that Norman beer was cheaper in Paris than English beer.

"Have you been getting along well with your compartment mate?" the Trainmaster asked.

"I haven't been informed who my compartment mate is," the

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sorcerer replied.

"Oh? Sorry. It's Father Armand Brun."

VII

By half-past four that afternoon, Master Seamus Kilpadraeg was dozing on the rearward couch, leaning back in the corner, his arms folded across his chest and his chin nearly touching his sternum. Since he did not snore, he offended no one. Father Armand had gone back to Compartment Number Two at a quarter after three, and, suspecting that the gentleman was tired, the sorcerer had decided to let him have the day couch there to himself.

The train and the saba game went on. Jason Quinte had dropped out of the game, but his place had been taken by the red-haired Valentine Herrick. Gavin Tailleur had taken Sidney Charpentier's place, and now Charpentier was sitting on the forward couch, his large nose buried in a book entitled *The Infernal Device,* an adventure novel. Sir Stanley Galbraith and Arthur Mac Kay were at the bar with a dice cup, playing for drinks.

Quinte and young Jamieson were back out on the observation deck with more cigars—presumably not Hashtpars this time.

Zeisler was still snoozing, and Lamar had apparently retired to his own compartment.

At Avignon, the train crossed the bridge that spanned the River Durance and curved away from the Rhone toward Marseille.

Master Seamus was roused from his doze by the sound of Simon Lamar's flat voice, but he neither opened his eyes nor lifted his head.

"Sidney," Lamar said to Charpentier, "I need your Healing Talent."

"What's the matter? Got a headache?"

"I don't mean *I* need it. Maurice does. He's got one hell of a hangover. I've ordered some caffe from Fred, but I'd like your help. He hasn't eaten all day, and he has a headache."

"Right. I'll come along. We'll have to get some food in him at Marseille." He rose and left with Lamar.

The sorcerer dozed off again.

VIII

When the *Napoli Express* pulled into Marseille at twenty-four minutes after six that evening, Master Seamus had already decided that he needed exercise before he needed food. He got off the train, went through the depot, and out into the street beyond. A

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brisk fifteen-minute walk got his blood going again, made him feel less drowsy, and whetted his appetite. The tangy air of the Duchy of Provence, given a touch of piquancy by the breeze from the Mediterranean, was an aperitif in itself.

The Cannebiere restaurant—which was nowhere near the street of the same name—was crowded by the time the sorcerer got back. With apologies to both sides, the waiter seated him at a table with a middle-aged couple named Duprey. Since he was not carrying his symbol-decorated carpetbag, there was no way for them to know that he was a magician, and he saw no reason to enlighten them.

He ordered the specialty of the house, which turned out to be a delicious, thick whitefish stew with lots of garlic. It went well with a dry white wine of rather pronounced character.

The Dupreys, as the conversation brought out, were the owners of a small leather-goods shop in Versaille who had carefully saved their money to make a trip to Rome, where they would spend a week, leaving the business in the hands of their two sons, each of whom was married to a delightful wife, and one of them had two daughters and the other a son, and. . .

And so on.

The sorcerer was not bored. He liked people, and the Dupreys were a very pleasant couple. He didn't have to talk much, and they asked him no questions. Not, that is, until the caffe was served. Then: "Tell me, Goodman Seamus," said the man, "why is it that we must stop at the Ligurian border tonight?"

"To check the bill-of-lading for the freight cars, I believe," the sorcerer said. "Some Italian law about certain imports."

"You see, John-Paul," said the woman, "it is as I told you."

"Yes, Martine, but I do not see why it should be. We are not stopped at the border of Champagne or Burgundy or Dauphine or Provence. Why Liguria?" He looked back at the magician. "Are we not all a part of the same Empire?"

"Well, yes—and no," Master Seamus said thoughtfully.

"What can you mean by that, sir?" John-Paul said, looking puzzled.

"Well, the Duchies of Italy, like the Duchies of Germany, are a part of the *Holy Roman* Empire, d'ye see, which was established in A.D. 862, and King John IV is Emperor. But they are *not* a part of what is unofficially called the *Anglo-French* Empire, which technically includes only France, England, Scotland, and Ireland."

"But we all have the same Emperor, don't we?" Martine asked.

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"Yes, but His Majesty's duties are different, d'ye see. The Italian States have their own Parliament, which meets in Rome, and the laws they have passed are slightly different than those of the Anglo-French Empire. Its acts are ratified, not by the Emperor directly, but by the Imperial Viceroy, Prince Roberto VII. In Italy, the Emperor reigns, but does not rule, d'ye see."

"I—I think so," John-Paul said hesitantly. "Is it the same in the Germanies? I mean, they're part of the Empire, too."

"Not quite the same. They're not as unified as the Duchies of Italy. Some of them take the title of Prince, and some would like to take the title of King, though that's forbidden by the Concordat of Magdeburg. But the general idea's the same. You might say that we're all different states, but with the same goals, under the same Emperor. We all want individual freedom, peace, prosperity, and happy homes. And the Emporor is the living symbol of those goals for all of us."

After a moment's silence, Martine said: "Goodness! That's very poetic, Goodman Seamus!"

"It still seems silly," John-Paul said doggedly, "to have to stop a train at the border between two Imperial Duchies."

Master Seamus sighed. "You should try visiting the Poles—or even the Magyars," he said. "The delay might be as much as two hours. You would have to have a passport. The train would be searched. Your luggage would be searched. Even *you* might be searched. And the Poles do that even when their own people are crossing their own internal borders."

"Well!" said Martine, "I certainly shan't ever go *there*!"

"No need to worry about that," said John-Paul. "Will you have more caffe, my dear?"

Master Seamus went back to the train feeling very relaxed, thankful that two very ordinary people had taken his mind off his troubles. He never saw nor heard of either of them again.

IX

By eight o'clock that evening, the *Napoli Express* was nearly twenty-five miles out of Marseille, headed for a rendezvous with the Ligurian border.

The saba game was in full swing again, and Master Seamus had the private feeling that, if it weren't for the fact that no one was permitted in the lounge while the train was in the station, three or four of the die-hards would never have bothered to eat.

By that time, the sorcerer found his eyelids getting heavy

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again. Since Father Armand was in deep conversation with two other passengers, Master Seamus decided he might as well go back to the compartment and take his turn on the day couch. He dropped off to sleep almost immediately.

The sorcerer's inward clock told him that it was ten minutes of nine when a rap sounded at the door.

"Yes? Who is it?"

"Fred, sir. Time to make up the bed, sir."

Wake up, it's time to go to sleep, the sorcerer thought glumly as he got his feet on the floor. "Certainly, Fred; come in."

"Sorry, sir, but the beds have to be made before I go off at nine. The night man doesn't have the keys, you see."

"Certainly; that's all right. I had me little nap, and I feel much better. I'll go on out to the lounge and let you work; there's hardly room in here for two of us."

"That's true, sir; thank you, sir."

There was a new man on behind the bar. As the sorcerer sat down, he put down the glass he was polishing and came over.

"May I serve you, sir?"

"Indeed you may, me lad. A beer, if you please."

"One beer; yes, sir." He took a pint mug, filled it, and served it.

There was no one else at the bar. The saba game, like the constellations in the sky, seemed unchanged. Master Seamus entertained a brief fantasy of taking this same trip a hundred years hence and seeing nothing remarkably different about that saba game. (Young Jamieson had replaced Boothroyd, but Hauser, Tailleur, Herrick, and Vandepole were still at it.) Master Seamus drank his beer slowly and looked around the lounge.

Sir Stanley Galbraith and Father Armand were seated on the rearward couch, not talking to each other, but reading newspapers which they had evidently picked up in Marseille.

Apparently, Charpentier had managed to cure Zeisler's hangover and get some food in him, for the two of them were sitting at the near table with Boothroyd and Lamar, talking in low tones. Zeisler was drinking caffe.

Mac Kay, Quinte, and Peabody were nowhere in sight.

Then Peabody, with his silver-handled stick, limped in from the passageway. He ordered ouiskie-and-splash and took it to the forward couch to sit by himself. He, too, had a newspaper, and began reading it with his touch-me-not attitude.

The sorcerer finished his beer and ordered another.

After a few minutes, Fred came back from his final duties for

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the day and said to the night man: "It's all yours, Tonio. Take over." And promptly left.

"No, no; I can get it. I'm closer." It was Zeisler's voice, raised just high enough for the sorcerer to hear it. His chair was nearest the bar. He got up, caffe cup in hand, and brought it over to the bar. "Another cup of caffe, Tonio."

"Yes, sir."

Zeisler smiled and nodded at Master Seamus, but said nothing. The sorcerer returned the greeting.

And then pretended not to notice what Tonio was doing. He set the cup down behind the bar, carefully poured in a good ounce of ouiskie, then filled the cup from the carafe that sat over a small alcohol lamp. It was done in such a way that the men at the table could not possibly have told that there was anything but caffe in the cup.

Zeisler had obviously tipped him well for that bit of legerdemain long before Master Seamus had come into the lounge.

Mentally, the sorcerer allowed himself a sad chuckle. Boothroyd, Lamar, and Charpentier thought they were dutifully keeping Zeisler sober, and here he was getting blotto before their very eyes. Ah, well.

Peabody put down his newspaper and came over to the bar, glass in hand. "Another ouiskie-and-splash, if you please," he said in a very low voice.

It was brought, and he returned to his seat and his newspaper. Tonio went back to polishing glasses.

Master Seamus was well into his third beer when the Trainmaster showed up. He went around and nodded and spoke to everyone, including the sorcerer. He went back to the observation deck, and Master Seamus concluded that Quinte and Mac Kay must be back there.

Trainmaster Edmund came back to the bar, took off his hat, and wiped his balding head with a handkerchief. "Warm evening. Tonio, how are your supplies holding out?"

"We'll have plenty for the rest of the evening, Trainmaster."

"Good; good. But I just checked the utility room, and we're short of towels. These men will be wanting to bathe in the morning, and we're way short. Run up to supply and get a full set. I'll watch the bar for you."

"Right away, Trainmaster." Tonio hurried without seeming to.

The Trainmaster left his cap off and stood behind the bar. He did not polish any glasses. "Another beer, Master Sorcerer?"

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"No, thanks, Trainmaster. I've had me limit for a while. I think I'll stretch me legs." He got up off the barchair and turned toward the observation deck.

"How about you, sir?" the Trainmaster called to Peabody, a few feet away, in the forward couch.

Peabody nodded, got up, and brought his glass over.

As Master Seamus passed the table where Zeisler and the other three were sitting, he heard Zeisler say: "You chaps know who that bearded chap at the bar is? I do."

"Maury, will you shut up?" said Boothroyd coldly.

Zeisler said no more.

X

"What is going on out there? A convention?" came the voice of the sorcerer's companion from the lower berth. It was a rhetorical question, so the Master Sorcerer didn't bother to answer.

It is not the loudness of a noise, nor even its unexpectedness, which wakes one up. It is the *unusual* noise that does that. And when the noise becomes *interesting,* it is difficult to go back to sleep.

The rumble and roar of the train as it moved toward Italy was actually soothing, once one got used to it. If it had only drowned out these other noises, all would have been well. But it didn't; it merely muffled them somewhat.

The sorcerer had been one of the last few to retire; only Boothroyd and Charpentier had still been in the lounge when he left to go to his compartment.

The hooded lamp had been burning low, and the gentle snores from the lower berth told him that his compartment-mate was already asleep.

He had prepared for bed and climbed in, only to find that the other man had left his newspaper on the other berth. It had been folded so that one article was uppermost, but in the dim light all he could read was the headline: NICHOLAS JOURDAN RITES TO BE HELD IN NAPOLI. It was an obituary notice.

He put the paper on the nearby shelf and began to doze off.

Then he heard a door open and close, and footsteps moving down the passageway. *Someone going to the toilet,* he thought drowsily. No, for the footsteps went right by his own door to Compartment Number One. He heard a light rap. *Hell of a time of night to go visiting,* he thought. Actually, it wasn't all that late—only a little after ten. But everyone aboard had been up since at

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least four that morning, some even longer. Oh, well; no business of his.

But there were other footsteps, farther down the corridor, other doors opening and closing.

He tried to get to sleep and couldn't. Things would get quiet for a minute or two, then they would start up again. From Compartment Three, he could hear voices, but only because the partition was next to his berth. There was only the sound; he couldn't distinguish any words. Being a curious man, he shamelessly put his ear to the wall, but could still make out no words.

He tried very hard to go to sleep, but the intermittent noises continued. Footsteps. Every five minutes or so, they would go to Number One or return from there, and, of course, these were the loudest. But there were others, up and down the passageway.

There was little he could do about it. He couldn't really say they were noisy. Just irritating.

He lay there, dozing intermittently, coming up out of it every time he heard something, drifting off each tine there was a lull.

After what seemed like hours, he decided there *was* something he could do about it. He could at least get up and see what was going on.

That was when his companion had said: "What's going *on* out there? A convention?"

The sorcerer made no reply, but climbed down the short ladder and grabbed his dressing gown. "I feel the call of nature," he said abruptly. He went out.

There was no one in the passageway. He walked slowly down to the toilet. No one appeared. No one stuck his head out of a door. No one even opened it a crack to peek. Nothing.

He took his time in the toilet. Five minutes. Ten.

He went back to his compartment. His slippers on the floor had been almost inaudible, and he'd been very careful about making any noise. They couldn't have heard him.

He reported what he had found to his compartment-mate.

"Well, whatever they were up to," said the other, "I am thoroughly awake now. I think I'll have a pipe before I go back to bed. Care to join me?

When they came into the lounge, Tonio was seated on a stool behind the bar. He looked up. "Good evening, Father; good evening, Master Sorcerer. May I help you?"

"No, we're just going out for a smoke," said the sorcerer. "But I guess you've had a pretty busy evening, eh?"

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"Me? Oh, no, sir. Nobody been in here for an hour and a half."

The two men went on out to the observation deck. Their conversation was interrupted a few minutes later by Tonio, who slid open the door and said: "Are you sure there's nothing I can get you gentlemen? I have to go forward to the supply car to fetch a few things for tomorrow, but I wouldn't want you to be needing anything."

"No, thanks. That'll be all right. As soon as the good father finishes his pipe, we'll be goin' back to bed."

Twenty minutes later, they did just that, and fell asleep immediately. It was twenty minutes after midnight.

XI

At 12:25, Tonio returned with his first load. During the daytime, when people were awake, it was permissible to use a handcart to trundle things through the aisles of the long train. But a sudden lurch of the train could upset a handcart and wake people up. Besides, there was much less to carry at night.

He carefully put his load of stuff away in the cabinets behind the bar, then went back to check the observation deck to see if his two gentlemen were still there. They were not. Good; everyone was asleep.

About time, too, he thought as he headed back uptrain for his second and last load. The gentlemen had certainly been having themselves some sort of party, going from one compartment to another like that. Though they hadn't made much noise, of course.

Tonio Bracelli was not a curious young man by nature, and if his gentlemen and ladies gave him no problems on the night run, he was content to leave them alone.

The train began to slow, and at thirty minutes after midnight, it came to an easy stop at the check station on the Ligurian border. The stop was only a formality, really. The Ligurian authorities had to check the bills of lading for the cargo in the freight cars at the front of the train, but there was no search or actual checking of the cargo itself. It was all bookkeeping.

Tonio picked out what he needed for the second load, and then stood talking to the Supply Master while the train was stopped. The locomotive braked easily enough to a smooth stop, but getting started again was sometimes a little jerky, and Tonio didn't want to be walking with his arms full when that happened. He'd wait until the train picked up speed.

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He reached the rearmost car at 12:50, took his load of goods to the bar and stashed them as before. Then he went to do his last duty until the morning: cleaning out the bathroom.

It was a touchy job—not because it was hard work, or even unpleasant, but because one had to be so infernally *quiet!* The day man could bang around all he liked, but if the night man did so, the gentlefolk in Four and Five, on each side of the bathroom, might complain.

He went up to the utility compartment, just forward of Number One, got his equipment, went back to the bathroom, and went to work.

When he was finished, he took a final look around to make sure. All looked fine until he came to the last check.

He looked at the floor.

Strange. What were those red stains?

He had just mopped down the floor. It was still damp, but . . .

He stepped to one side and looked down.

The stains were coming from his right boot.

He sat down on the necessary, lifted his right foot, and looked at the bootsole. Red stains, almost gone, now.

Where the devil had they come from?

Tonio Bracelli, if not curious, was conscientious. After wiping the stains from his boot and checking the other to make sure there were none, he wiped the floor and went out to track down the source of those stains.

"Track" was certainly the word. He had left footprints of the stuff, whatever it was, up and down on the tan floor of the passageway. The darker tracks led uptrain. He followed them.

When he found their source, he lost his composure.

A great pool of what was obviously blood had seeped out from beneath the door of Compartment Number One.

XII

The Irish sorcerer was brought out of his sleep by a banging that almost slammed him awake, and a voice that was screaming: *"Sir! Sir! Open the door! Sir! Are you all right? Sir!"*

Both of the men in Compartment Number Two were on their feet and at the door within two seconds.

But the banging was not at their door, but at the one to their right—Number One. The two men grabbed their robes and went out.

Tonio was pounding his fists on the door of Number One and

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shouting—almost screaming—at the top of his voice. Down the passageway, other doors were opening.

An arm reached out and a hand grabbed Tonio's shoulder. "Now, calm down, my son! What's the trouble?"

Tonio suddenly gasped and looked at the man who had laid such a firm hand on his shoulder. "Oh, Father! Look! Look at this!" He stepped back and pointed at the blood at his feet. "He doesn't answer! What should I do, Father?"

"The first thing to do, my son, is go get the Trainmaster. You don't have the key to this door, do you? No. Then go fetch Trainmaster Edmund immediately. But mind! No noise, no shouting. Don't alarm the passengers in the other cars. This is for the Trainmaster only. Do you understand?"

"Yes, Father. Certainly." His voice was much calmer.

"Very well. Now, quickly." Then, and only then, did that strong hand release the young man's shoulder. Tonio left—hurriedly, but now obviously under control.

"Now, Master Seamus, Sir Stanley, we must be careful not to crowd around here any more than necessary."

Sir Stanley, who had come boiling out of Number Eight only half a second later than the sorcerer and his companion had come out of Number Two, turned to block the passageway.

His voice seemed to fill the car. "All right, now! Stand away, all of you! You men get back to your quarters! Move!"

Within half a minute, the passageway was empty, except for three men. Then Sir Stanley said: "What's happened here, Father?"

"I know no more than you do, Sir Stanley. We must wait for the Trainmaster."

"I think we ought to—" Whatever it was that Sir Stanley thought they ought to do was cut off forever by the appearance of Trainmaster Edmund, who came running in from the dining car ahead, followed by Tonio, and asked almost the same question.

"What's happened here?"

The magician stepped forward. "We don't know, Trainmaster, but that looks like blood, and I suggest you open that door."

"Certainly, certainly." The Trainmaster keyed back the bolt of Number One.

On Lower One, Goodman John Peabody lay with his smashed head hanging over the edge, his scalp a mass of clotted blood. He was very obviously quite dead.

"I wouldn't go in there if I were you, Trainmaster," said the

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sorcerer, putting an arm in front of Trainmaster Edmund as he started to enter.

"What? On my own train? Why not?" He sounded indignant.

"With all due apologies, Trainmaster, have you ever had a murder on your train before?"

"Well, no, but—"

"Have you ever been involved in a murder investigation?"

"No, but—"

"Well, again with apologies, Trainmaster, I have. I'm a trained forensic sorcerer. The investigators aren't going to like it if we go tramping in there, destroying clues. Do you have a chirurgeon on board?"

"Yes; the train chirurgeon, Dr. Vonner. But how do you know it's murder?"

"It's not suicide," the sorcerer said flatly. "His head was beaten repeatedly by that heavy, silver-headed walking-stick there on the floor. A man doesn't kill himself that way, and he doesn't do it accidentally. Send Tonio for the chirurgeon."

Dr. Vonner, it turned out, had had some experience with legal cases and knew what to do—and, more important, what *not* to do. He said, after examination, that not only was Peabody dead but, in his opinion, had been dead for at least an hour. Then he said that if he was needed no further, he was going back to bed. The Trainmaster let him go.

"It's nearly two hours yet to Genova," the sorcerer said. "We won't be able to notify the authorities until then. But that's all right; nobody can get off the train while it's at speed, and I can put a preservative spell over the body and an avoidance spell on the compartment."

A voice from behind the sorcerer said: "Should I not give the poor fellow the Last Rites of Holy Mother Church?"

The Irishman turned and shook his head. "No, Father. He's quite dead now, and that can wait. If there's any Black Magic involved in this killing, your work could dissipate all trace of it, destroying what might be a valuable clue."

"I see. Very well. Shall I fetch you your bag?"

"If you would be so good, Reverend Sir."

The bag was brought, and the sorcerer went about his work. The preservative spell, cast with a night-black wand, was quickly done; the body would remain in stasis until the authorities finished their investigation. The sorcerer noted the time carefully, checking his wristwatch against that of the Trainmaster.

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The avoidance spell was somewhat more involved, requiring the use of a smoking thurible and two wands, but when it was finished, no one would enter that room, or even look into it of his own free will. "You'd best re-lock that door, Trainmaster," said the Irish sorcerer. He looked down at the floor. "As for that stain, Tonio has already walked through it, but we'd best not have any more people do so. Would you be so good as to tell the others to stay away from this area until we get to Genova, Sir Stanley?"

"Certainly, Master Sorcerer."

"Thank you. I'll put me bag away now."

XIII

The sorcerer put his symbol-decorated carpetbag down on the floor while his compartment-mate closed the door behind them.

"Now that's what I call stayin' in character, me lord," said Sean O Lochlainn, Chief Forensic Sorcerer for His Royal Highness, the Duke of Normandy.

"What? Oh, you mean offering to perform the Last Rites?" Lord Darcy, the Duke's Chief Investigator, smiled. "It's what any real priest would have done, and I knew you'd get me off the hook." When he did come up out of character, he looked much younger, in spite of the disguising white hair and beard.

"Well, I did what I could, me lord. Now I suppose there's nothing for us to do but wait until we get to Genova, where the Italian authorities can straighten this out."

His lordship frowned. "I am afraid we shall have to do more than that, my dear Sean. Time is precious. We absolutely *must* get that naval treaty to Athens in time. That means we have to be in Brindisi by ten o'clock tonight. And that means we *have* to catch that Napoli-Brindisi local, which leaves fifteen minutes after the *Napoli Express* gets into the station. I don't know what the Genovese authorities will do, but if they don't hold us up in Genova, they most certainly will when we reach Rome. They'll cut the car off and hold the whole lot of us until they *do* solve it. Even if we were to go through all the proper channels and prove who we are and what we're up to, it would take so long that we'd miss that train."

Now Master Sean looked worried. "What do we do if it *isn't* solved by then, in spite of everything we do?"

Lord Darcy's face became impassive. "In that case, I shall be forced to leave you. 'Father Armand Brun' would perforce disappear, evading the Roman Armsmen and becoming a fugitive—

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undoubtedly accused of the murder of one John Peabody. I would have to get to Brindisi by myself, under cover. It would be difficult in the extreme, for the Italians are very sharp indeed at that sort of work."

"I would be with you, me lord," Master Sean said stoutly.

Lord Darcy shook his head. "No. What would be difficult for one man would be impossible for two—especially two who had been known to have escaped together. 'Master Seamus Kilpadraeg' is a bona fide sorcerer, with bona fide papers from the Duke of Normandy, and, ultimately, from the King himself. 'Father Armand' is a total phony. You can stick it out; I can't. Unless, of course, I want to explode our whole mission."

"Then, me lord, we must solve the case," the magician said simply. "Where do we start?"

His lordship smiled, sighed, and sat down on the lower bed. "Now, that's more like it, my dear Sean. We start with everything we know about Peabody. When did you first notice him?"

"As I came aboard the train, me lord. I saw the walking-stick he carried. On an ordinary stick there is a decorative silver ring about two inches down from the handle. The ring on his stick was a good four inches below the silver head, the perfect length for the hilt on a sword stick. Just above the ring is an inconspicuous black stud that you press with your thumb to release the hilt from the scabbard."

Lord Darcy nodded silently. He had noticed the weapon.

"Then there was his limp," Master Sean continued. "A man with a real limp walks with the same limp all the time. He don't exaggerate it when he's walking slowly, then practically lose it when he's in a hurry."

"Ah! I hadn't noticed that," his lordship admitted. "It is difficult to judge the quality of a man's limp when he is trying to move about on a lurching train car, and I observed him at no other time. Very good! And what did you deduce from that?"

"That the limp was an excuse to carry the stick."

"And I dare say you are right. Then he needed that stick as a weapon, or thought he would, and was not used to carrying it."

Master Sean frowned. "How so, me lord?"

"Otherwise, he would either have perfected his limp or not used a limp at all." Lord Darcy paused, then: "Anything else?"

"Only that he carried his small suitcase to lunch with him, and that he always sat in the lounge on the first couch, where he could watch the door of his compartment," Master Sean said. "I

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think he was afraid someone would steal his suitcase, me lord."

"Or something in it," Lord Darcy amended.

"What would that be, me lord?"

"If we knew that, my dear Sean, we'd be a great deal closer to solving this problem than we are at this moment. We—" He stopped suddenly and put his finger to his lips. There were footsteps in the passageway again. Not as loud this time, for the men were wearing slippers instead of boots, but the doors could be heard opening and closing.

"I think the convention has started again," Lord Darcy said quietly. He walked over to the door. By the time he was easing it open, he had again donned the character of an elderly priest. He opened the door almost noiselessly.

Sir Stanley, facing down the car toward the lounge, had his back to Lord Darcy. Through the windows beyond him, the Ligurian countryside rushed by in the darkness.

"Standing guard, Sir Stanley?" Lord Darcy asked mildly.

Sir Stanley turned. "Guard? Oh, no, Father. The rest of us are going into the lounge to discuss this. Would you and Master Seamus join us?"

"I would be glad to. You, Master Sorcerer?"

Master Sean blinked, and, after a moment, said: "Certainly, Father."

XIV

"*Are you* **absolutely** *certain it was murder*?" Gwiliam Hauser's voice was harsh.

Master Sean O Lochlainn leaned back in the couch and narrowed his eyes at Hauser. "*Absolutely* certain? No, sir. Can you tell me, sir, how a man can have the whole front of his head smashed in while lying on a lower berth? *Unless* it is murder? If so, then I may reconsider my statement that I am *reasonably* certain that it was murder."

Hauser stroked his dark-streaked white beard. "I see. Thank you, Master Sorcerer." His sharp eyes looked round at the others in the lounge. "Did any of you—*any* of you—see anything at all that looked suspicious last night?"

"Or *hear* anything?" Lord Darcy added.

Hauser gave him a quick glance. "Yes. Or hear anything."

The others all looked at each other. Nobody said a word.

Finally, the too-handsome Mac Kay leaned back in his chair at the table near the bar and said: "Uh, Father, you and the Master

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Sorcerer had the compartment next to Peabody's. Didn't either of you hear anything?"

"Why, yes, we did," Lord Darcy said mildly. "We both remarked upon it."

All eyes in the lounge were focused on him now, with the exception of Master Sean's. The sorcerer was watching the others.

"Beginning at about twenty minutes after ten last night," Lord Darcy continued in the same mild voice, "and continuing for about an hour and a half, there was an absolute parade of footsteps up and down that passageway. There was much conversation and soft rappings at doors. There were knockings on the door of Peabody's compartment more than a dozen times. Other than that, I heard nothing out of the usual."

The three-second silence was broken by Sir Stanley. "We were just walking around, talking. Visiting, you know."

Zeisler was over at the bar, drinking caffe. Master Sean hadn't seen it this time, but he was certain Tonio had spiked the cup again. "That's right," Zeisler said in a sudden voice. "Talking. I couldn't sleep, myself. Had a nap this afternoon. Went visiting. Seems nobody else could sleep, either."

Boothroyd nodded. "I couldn't sleep either. Noisy damn train."

At that point all the others joined in—the words were different, but the agreement was there.

"And Peabody couldn't sleep either?" Lord Darcy's voice was bland.

"No, he couldn't," said Sir Stanley gruffly.

"I didn't know any of you knew the gentleman." Lord Darcy's voice was soft, his eyes mild, his manner gentle. "I did notice one of you spoke to him during the day."

"I recognized him," Zeisler said. The ouiskie wasn't slowing his brain down much. "Chap I used to know. Didn't get his name, and didn't recognize him at first, what with the beard. Didn't use to wear a beard, you see. So I went to talk to him—renew old acquaintance, you know. Bit shy at first, but we got along. He wanted to talk to the other chaps, so—" He gestured with one hand, leaving the sentence unfinished.

"I see." His Lordship smiled benevolently. "Then which of you was the last to see him alive?"

Hauser looked at Jason Quinte. "Was that you, Quinte?"

"Me? No, I think it was Val."

"No, Mac talked to him after I did."

"But then Sharpie went back in, didn't you, Sharpie?"

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"Yes, but I thought Simon—"

And so it went. Lord Darcy listened with a sad but benevolent smile on his face. After five minutes, it was obvious that they could not agree on who had seen Peabody last, and that not one of them wanted to own up to it.

Finally, Gavin Tailleur stood up from his seat in the rearward couch. His face was paler than usual, making the scar more conspicuous. "I don't know about the rest of you, but it's obvious *I* am not going to get any more sleep tonight. I am tired of wandering about in my nightclothes. I'm going back and put some clothes on."

Valentine Herrick, his bright red hair looking badly mussed, said: "Well, I'd like to get some sleep, myself, but . . ."

Lord Darcy, in a voice that seemed soft but still carried, said: "It doesn't much matter what we do now; we won't get any sleep after we reach Genova, and we might as well be prepared for it."

XV

Master Sean wanted to talk privately with Lord Darcy. For one thing, he wanted to know why his lordship had permitted all the passengers in the car to get together to compare stories when the proper procedure would be to get them alone and ask them questions separately. Granted, here in Italy Lord Darcy had no authority to question them; and, granted, he was playing the part of a priest, but—damn it!—he should have done *something*.

But no, he just sat there on the forward sofa, smiling, watching, listening, and saying very little, while the other passengers sat around and talked or drank or both.

There was quite a bit of caffe consumed, but the ouiskie, brandy, wine, and beer were not neglected, either. Master Sean and Lord Darcy stuck to caffe.

Tonio didn't seem to mind. He had to stay up all night, anyway, and at least he wasn't bored.

Just before the train reached Genova, the Trainmaster returned. He took off his hat and asked for the gentlemen's attention.

"Gentlemen, we are approaching Genova. Normally, if you happened to be awake, you could take advantage of the hour stopover to go to the restaurant or tavern, although most people sleep through this stop.

"I am afraid, however, that I shall have to insist that you all remain aboard until the authorities arrive. The doors will not be

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opened until they get here. I am sorry to inconvenience you in this way, but such is my duty."

There were some low mutterings among the men, but nobody said anything to contradict Trainmaster Edmund.

"Thank you, gentlemen," the Trainmaster said. "I shall do my best to see that the authorities get their work over with as promptly as possible." He returned his hat to his head and departed.

"Technically," Boothroyd said, "I suppose we're all under arrest."

"No," Hauser growled. "We are being detained for questioning. Not quite the same thing. We're only here as witnesses."

One of us isn't, Master Sean thought. And wondered how many others were thinking the same thing. But nobody said anything.

The Genovese Armsmen were surprisingly prompt. Within fifteen minutes after the train's brakes had made their last hissing sigh, a Master-at-Arms, two Sergeants-at-Arms, and four Armsmen had come aboard. All were in uniform.

This was merely the preliminary investigation. Names were taken and brief statements were written down by the Master and one of the Sergeants, apparently the only ones of the seven who spoke Anglo-French with any fluency. Master Sean and Lord Darcy both spoke Italian, but neither said anything about it. No need to volunteer information that wasn't asked for.

It was while the preliminary investigation was going on that the two Norman law officers found where each of the other twelve were billeted.

Compartment No. 3 — Maurice Zeisler; Sidney Charpentier
Compartment No. 4 — Martyn Boothroyd; Gavin Tailleur
Compartment No. 5 — Simon Lamar; Arthur Mac Kay
Compartment No. 6 — Valentine Herrick; Charles Jamieson
Compartment No. 7 — Jason Quinte; Lyman Vandepole
Compartment No. 8 — Sir Stanley Galbraith; Gwiliam Hauser

Number Two, of course, contained "Armand Brun" and "Seamus Kilpadraeg" and John Peabody had been alone in Number One.

The uniformed Master-at-Arms made a short, polite bow to Master Sean. Since he was armed by the sword at his side, he did not remove his hat. "Master Sorcerer, I believe it was you who so kindly put the avoidance spell and the preservation spell on the deceased one?"

"Aye, Master Armsman, I am."

"I must ask you to remove the avoidance spell, if you please. It

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is necessary that I inspect the body in order to determine that death has indeed taken place."

"Oh, certainly, certainly. Me bag is in me compartment. Won't take but a minute."

As they went down the passageway, Master Sean saw Trainmaster Edmund standing patiently by the door of Number One, holding the key in his hand. The sorcerer knew what the Armsman's problem was. A death had been reported, but, so far, he hadn't seen any real evidence of it. Even if the Trainmaster had unlocked the door, the spell would have kept both men out and, indeed, kept them from even looking into the compartment.

Master Sean got his symbol-decorated carpetbag out of Number Two, and told Trainmaster Edmund: "Unlock it, Trainmaster—and then let me have a little room to work."

The Trainmaster unlocked the door, but did not open it. He and the Master-at-Arms stood well back, in front of Number Three. Master Sean noticed with approval that a Man-at-Arms was standing at the far end of the passageway, in front of Number Eight, facing the lounge, blocking the way.

Himself being immune to his own avoidance spell, Master Sean looked all around the compartment. Everything was as he had left it. He looked down at the body. The blood still looked fresh, so the preservative spell had been well cast—not that the stout little Irish sorcerer had ever doubted it, but it was always best to check.

He looked down at the floor near his feet. The blood which had leaked out into the passageway was dark and dried. It had not, he noticed, been disturbed since Tonio had tromped through it. Good.

Master Sean placed his carpetbag carefully on the floor and took from it a small bronze brazier with tripod legs. He put three lumps of willow charcoal in it, set it on the floor in the doorway, and carefully lit the charcoal. When it was hot and glowing, he took a pinch of powder from a small glass phial and dropped it on the coals. A spiral of aromatic smoke curled upwards. The magician's lips moved silently.

Then he took a four-by-four-inch square of white paper from his bag and folded it in a curious and intricate manner. Murmuring softly, he dropped it on the coals, where it flared into orange flame and subsided into gray ash.

After a moment, he took a bronze lid from among his paraphernalia and fitted it to the brazier to smother the coals. He picked up the brazier by one leg and moved it aside. Then he stood up

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and looked at the Armsman. "There you are, Master Armsman; it's all yours." Then he gestured. "Watch the bloodstain, here, and watch that brazier. It's still hot."

The Master-at-Arms went in, looked at the remains of John Peabody and touched one wrist. He wrote in a notebook. Then he came out. "Lock it up again, Trainmaster. I can now state that a man identified as one John Peabody is dead, and that there is reason to believe that a felony has been committed."

Trainmaster Edmund looked surprised. "Is that all?"

"For now," the Armsmaster said. "Lock it up, and give me the key."

The Trainmaster locked the compartment, saying as he did so: "I can't give you a duplicate. We don't keep them around for security reasons. If a passenger loses one—" He took the key from the lock"—we get a duplicate either from the Paris office or the Napoli office. I'll have to give you one of my master keys. And I'll want a receipt for it."

"Certainly. How many master keys do you have?"

"For this car? Two. This one, here, and one that's locked in my office forward for emergencies."

"See that it stays locked up. This key, then, is a master for this car only?"

"Oh, yes. Each car has separate lock sets. What are you doing, Master Sorcerer?" The Trainmaster looked puzzled.

Master Sean was kneeling by the door, the fingers of his right hand touching the lock, his eyes closed. "Just checking." The sorcerer stood up. "I noticed your lock spell on my own lock when I first used my key. Commercial, but very tight and well-knit. No wonder you don't keep duplicates aboard. Even an exact duplicate wouldn't work unless it was attuned to the spell. May I see that master key, Armsmaster? Thank you. Mmmmm. Yes. Thank you again." He handed the key back.

"What were you checking just now?" the Trainmaster asked.

"I wanted to see if the spell had been tampered with," Master Sean explained. "It hasn't been."

"Thank you, Master Sorcerer," the Master-at-Arms said, making a note in his notebook. "And thank you, Trainmaster. That will be all for now."

The three of them went on back to the lounge.

There was an empty space on the sofa next to Lord Darcy—who was still playing "Father Armand" to the hilt—so Master Sean walked over and sat beside him.

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"How are things going, Father?" he asked in a low, conversational tone. In the relative quiet of the stationary car, it was easier to talk in soft voices without seeming to whisper.

"Interestingly," Lord Darcy murmured. "I haven't heard everything, of course, but I've been listening. They seem to be finished now."

At that moment, one of the Sergeants-at-Arms said, in Italian: "Master Armsman, here comes the Praefect."

Master Sean, like the Armsmaster, turned his head to look out the window. Then he looked quickly away.

"Our goose is cooked," he said very softly to Lord Darcy. "Look who's coming."

"I did. I don't know him."

"I do. It's Cesare Sarto. And *he* knows *me*."

XVI

The Roman Praefecture of Police has no exact counterpart in any other unit of the Empire. As elsewhere, every Duchy in Italy has its own organization of Armsmen which enforces the law within the boundaries of that Duchy. The Roman Praefecture is an instrumentality of the Italian Parliament to co-ordinate the efforts of these organizations.

The Praefects' powers are limited. Even in the Principality of Latium, where Rome is located, they have no police powers unless they have been called in by the local authorities. (Although a "citizen's arrest" by a Roman Praefect carries a great deal more weight than such an arrest by an ordinary civilian.)

They wear no uniforms; their only official identification is a card and a small golden shield with the letters SPQR above a bas-relief of the Capitoline Wolf, with a serial number and the words *Praefecture of Police* below her.

Their record for cases solved and convictions obtained is high, their record for violence low. These facts, plus the always gentlemanly or ladylike behavior of every Praefect, has made the Roman Praefecture of Police one of the most prestigious and honored bodies of criminal investigators on the face of the Earth.

In the gaslight of the train platform, Cesare Sarto waited as the Master-at-Arms came out of the car to greet him. Master Sean kept his face averted, but Lord Darcy watched carefully.

Sarto was a man of medium height with dark hair and eyes and a neatly-trimmed mustache. He was of average build, but carried himself like an athlete. There was power and speed in that well-

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muscled body. His face, while not exactly handsome, was strong and showed character and intelligence.

After a few minutes, he came into the car. He put a suitcase on the floor and looked around at the fourteen passengers assembled in the lounge. They all watched him, waiting.

His eyes betrayed no flicker of recognition as they passed over Master Sean's face.

Then he said: "Gentlemen, I am Cesare Sarto, an agent of the Roman Praefecture of Police. The Chief Master-at-Arms of the city of Genova has asked me to take charge of this case—at least until we get to Rome." His Anglo-French was almost without accent.

"Technically," he continued, "this is the only way it can be handled. John Peabody was apparently murdered, but we do not yet know whether he was killed in Provence or in Liguria, and until we do, we won't know who has jurisdiction over the case.

"As of now, we must act on the assumption that Peabody died *after* this train crossed the Italian border. Therefore, this train will proceed to Rome. If we have not determined exactly what happened by then, this car will be detached and the investigation will continue. Those of you who can be exonerated beyond doubt will be allowed to go on to Napoli. The others, I fear, will have to be detained."

"Do you mean," Sir Stanley interrupted, "that you suspect one of *us?*"

"No one of you individually, sir. Not yet. But all of you collectively, yes. It surely must be obvious, sir, that since Peabody was killed in this car, someone in this car must have killed him. May I ask your name, sir?"

"Sir Stanley Galbraith," the gray-haired man said rather curtly.

Praefect Cesare looked at his notebook. "Ah, yes. Thank you, Sir Stanley." He looked around at the others. "I have here a list of your names as procured by the Master-at-Arms. In order that I may know you better, I will ask that each of you raise his hand when his name is called."

As he called off the names, it was obvious that each man's name and face were linked permanently in his memory when the hand was raised.

When he came to "Seamus Kilpadraeg," he looked the sorcerer over exactly as he had the others, then went on to the next name.

When he had finished, he said: "Now, gentlemen, I will ask you to go to your compartments and remain there until I call for you.

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The train will be leaving for Rome in—" He glanced at his wristwatch. "—eighteen minutes. Thank you."

Master Sean and Lord Darcy dutifully returned to their compartment.

"Praefect Cesare," Lord Darcy said, "is not only highly intelligent, but very quick-minded."

"How do you deduce that, me lord?"

"You said he knew you, and yet he showed no sign of it. Obviously, he perceived that if you were traveling under an alias, you must have a good reason for it. And, you being who you are, that the reason was probably a legitimate one. Rather than betray you in public, he decided to wait until he could talk to you privately. When he does, tell him that Father Armand is your confidant and close friend. Vouch for me, but don't reveal my identity. I expect him to be here within minutes."

There came a knock on the door.

Master Sean slid it open to reveal Praefect Cesare Sarto. "Come in, Praefect," the sorcerer said. "We've been expecting you."

"Oh?" Sarto raised an eyebrow. "I would like to talk to you privately, Master Seamus."

Master Sean lowered his voice almost to a whisper. "Come in Cesare. Father Armand knows who I am."

The Praefect came in, and Master Sean slid the door shut. "Sean O Lochlainn at your service, Praefect Cesare," he said with a grin.

"Sean!" the Praefect grabbed him by both shoulders. "It's been a long time! You should write more often." He turned to Lord Darcy. "Pardon me, Padre, but I haven't seen my friend here since we took a course together at the University of Milano, five years ago. 'The Admissibility of Certain Magically Derived Evidence in Criminal Jurisprudence' it was."

"That's all right," Lord Darcy said. "I'm glad for both of you."

The Praefect looked for a moment at the slack-shouldered, white-haired, white-bearded man who peered benignly at him over gold-rimmed half-glasses. Then he looked back at Master Sean. "You say you know the Padre?"

"Intimately, for many years," Master Sean said. "Anything you have to say to me can be said in front of Father Armand in perfect confidence. You can trust him as you trust me."

"I didn't mean—" Sarto cut himself off and turned to Lord Darcy. "Reverend Sir, I did not intend to imply that one of the Sacred Clergy was not to be trusted. But this is a murder case,

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and they're touchy to handle. Do you know anything about criminology?"

"I have worked with criminals, and I have heard their confessions many times," Lord Darcy said with a straight face. "I think I can say I have some insight into the criminal mind."

Master Sean, with an equally straight face, said: "I think I can safely say that there are several cases that Lord Darcy might not have solved without the aid of this man here."

Praefect Cesare relaxed. "Well! That's fine, then. Sean, is it any of my business why you're traveling under an alias?"

"I'm doing a little errand for Prince Richard. It has nothing whatever to do with John Peabody, so, strictly speaking, it is none of your business. I imagine, though, that if you really had to know, His Highness would give me permission to tell you before any case came to trial."

"All right; let that rest for now. There are some other questions I must ask you."

The questions elicited the facts that neither Master Sean nor "Father Armand" had ever seen or heard of Peabody before, that neither had ever spoken to him, and that each could account for his time during the night. On being put the direct question, each gave his solemn word that he had not killed Peabody.

"Very well," the Praefect said at last, "I'll accept it as a working hypothesis that you two are innocent. Now, I have a little problem I want you to help me with."

"The murder, you mean?" Master Sean asked.

"In a way, yes. You see, it's like this: I have never handled a murder case before. My field is fraud and embezzlement. I'm an accountant, not, strictly speaking, an Armsman at all. I just happened to be in Genova, finishing up another case. I was going to go back to Rome on this train, anyway. So I got a teleson call from Rome, telling me to take over until we get there. Rome doesn't expect me to solve the case; Rome just wants me as a caretaker until the experts can take over."

He was silent for a moment, then, suddenly, a white-toothed, almost impish grin came over his face. "But the minute I recognized you, an idea occurred to me. With your experience, we just might be able to clear this up before we get to Rome! It would look good on my record if I succeed, but no black mark if I don't. I can't lose, you see. The head of the homicide division, Angelo Ratti, will be waiting for us at the station in Rome, and I'd give half a year's pay to see the look on his face if I could hand him

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the killer when I step off."

Master Sean gawped. Then he found words. "You mean you want us to help you nail the murderer *before* we get to Rome?"

"Exactly."

"I think that's a capital idea," said Lord Darcy.

XVII

The *Napoli Express* moved toward Rapello, on its way to Rome. In a little over an hour, it would be dawn. At four minutes of noon, the train would arrive in Rome.

First on the agenda was a search of the body and the compartment in which it lay. Peabody's suitcase was in the locker reserved for Lower One, but the key was in the lock, so there was no trouble getting it. It contained nothing extraordinary—only clothes and toilet articles. Peabody himself had been carrying nothing unusual, either—if one excepted the sword stick. He had some loose change, a gold sovereign, two silver sovereigns, and five gold-sovereign-notes. He carried some keys that probably fit his home locks or office locks. A card identified him as Commander John Wycliffe Peabody, Imperial Navy, Retired.

"I see nothing of interest there," Praefect Cesare commented.

"It's what *isn't* there that's of interest," Lord Darcy said.

The Praefect nodded. "Exactly. Where is the key to his compartment?"

"It appears to me," Lord Darcy said, "that the killer went in, killed Peabody, took the key, and locked the compartment so that the body wouldn't be found for a while."

"I agree," Cesare said.

"Then the murderer might still have the key on him," Master Sean said.

"It's possible." Praefect Cesare looked glum. "But it's far more likely that it's on or near the railroad tracks somewhere between here and Provence."

"That would certainly be the intelligent thing to do," Lord Darcy said. "Should we search for it anyway?"

"Not just yet, I think. If he kept it, he won't throw it away now. If not, we won't find it."

Lord Darcy was rather pleased with the Praefect's answer. It was the one he would have given, had he been in charge. It was rather irksome not to be in charge of the case, but at least Cesare Sarto knew what he was doing.

"The killer," the Praefect went on, "had no way of knowing that

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the blood from Peabody's scalp would run under the door and into the passageway. Let's assume it hadn't. When would the body have been discovered?"

"Probably not until ten o'clock this morning," Master Sean said firmly. "I've taken this train before, though not with the same crew. The day man—that's Fred, this trip—comes on at nine. He makes up the beds of those who are already awake, but he doesn't start waking people up until about ten. It might have been as late as half past ten before Peabody was found."

"I see," said Praefect Cesare. "I don't see that that gets us any forwarder just yet, but we'll keep it in mind. Now, we cannot do an autopsy on the body, of course, but I'd like a little more information on those blows and the weapon."

"I think I can oblige you, Praefect," said Master Sean.

The sorcerer carefully inspected the walking stick with its concealed blade. "We'll do this first; it's the easier job and may give us some clue that will tell us what to do next."

From his bag, he took a neatly-folded white cerecloth and spread it over the small nearby table. "First time I've done this on a train," he muttered, half to himself. "Have to watch me balance."

The other two said nothing.

He took out a thin, three-inch, slightly concave golden disk, a pair of tweezers, a small insufflator, and an eight-inch, metallic-looking, blue-gray wand with crystalline sapphire tips.

With the tweezers, he selected two hairs, one from the dead man and one from the silver head of the stick. He carefully laid them parallel, an inch and a half apart, on the cerecloth. Then he touched each with the wand, murmuring solemn spondees of power under his breath. Then he stood up, well away from the hairs, not breathing.

Slowly, like two tiny logs rolling toward each other, the hairs came together, still parallel.

"His hair on the stick, all right," Master Sean said. "We'll see about the blood."

The only sound in the room except the rumbling of the train was the almost inaudible movement of Sarto's pen on his notebook.

A similar incantation, this time using the little golden saucer, showed the blood to be the same.

"This one's a little more complex," Master Sean said. "Since the wounds are mostly on the forward part of the head, I'll have to

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turn him over and put him flat on his back. Will that be all right?" He directed the question to the Praefect.

"Certainly," Praefect Cesare said. "I have all the notes and sketches of the body's position when found. Here, I'll give you a hand."

Moving a two-hundred-pound dead body is not easy in the confines of a small compartment, but it would have been much more difficult if Master Sean's preservative spell had not prevented *rigor mortis* from setting in.

"There; that'll do. Thank you," the stout little sorcerer said. "Would either of you care to check the wounds visually?"

They would. Master Sean's powerful magnifying glass was passed from hand to hand.

"Bashed in right proper," Sarto muttered.

"Thorough job," Lord Darcy agreed. "But not efficient. Only two or three of those blows were hard enough to kill, and there must be a dozen of them. Peculiar."

"Now, gentlemen," the sorcerer said, "we'll see if that stick actually was the murder weapon."

It was a crucial test. Hair and blood had been planted before on innocent weapons. The thaumaturgical science would tell them whether or not it had happened this time.

Master Sean used the insufflator to blow a cloud of powder over both the area of the wounds and the silver knob on the stick. There was very little of the powder, and it was so fine that the excess floated away like smoke.

"Now, if you'll turn that lamp down . . ."

In the dim yellow glow of the turned-down wall lamp, almost no details could be seen. All was in shadow. Only the glittering tips of Master Sean's rapidly moving wand could be seen, glowing with a blue light of their own.

Then, abruptly, there seemed to be thousands of tiny white fireflies moving over the upper part of the dead man's face—and over the knob of the stick. There were several thin, twinkling threads of the minute sparks between face and knob.

After several seconds, Master Sean gave his wand a final snap with his wrist, and the tiny sparks vanished.

"That's it. Turn up the lights, if you please. The stick was definitely the murder weapon."

Praefect Cesare Sarto nodded slowly, looking thoughtful. "Very well. What's our next step?" He paused. "What would Lord Darcy do next?"

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His lordship was standing behind and a little to the left of the Italian, and, as Master Sean looked at both of them, Darcy traced an interrogation point in the air with a forefinger.

"Why, me lord's next step," said the sorcerer as if he had known all along, "would be to question the suspects again. More thoroughly, this time." Lord Darcy held up his forefinger, and Master Sean added: "One at a time, of course."

"That sounds sensible," Sarto agreed. "And I can get away with having you two present by saying that you are Acting Forensic Sorcerer on this case and that you, Reverend Sir, are *amicus curia* as a representative of Holy Mother Church. By the way, are you a Sensitive, Father?"

"No, unfortunately, I am not."

"Pity. Well, we needn't tell them that. Let them worry. Now, what sort of questions do we ask? Give me a case of tax fraud, and I have an impressive roster of questions to ask the people involved, but I'm a little out of my element here."

"Why, as to that . . ." Lord Darcy began.

XVIII

"They are lying," Praefect Cesare said flatly, three hours later.

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"Each and severally, every single one of the bastards is lying."

"And not very well, either," added Master Sean.

"Well, let us see what we have here," Lord Darcy said, picking up his notes.

They were seated at the rear table in the lounge; there was no one else in the car. Segregation of the suspects had not been difficult; the Trainmaster had opened up the dining car early, and the Genovese Master-at-Arms that Sarto had brought with him was watching over it. The men had been taken from their compartments one at a time, questioned, then taken back to the dining car. That kept them from discussing the questioning with those who hadn't been questioned yet.

Tonio, the night man, had been questioned first, then told to get out of the car and stay out. He didn't mind; he knew there would be no business and no tips that morning.

The Trainmaster had arranged for caffe to be served early in the rear of the dining car, and Lord Darcy had prepared the three interrogators a pot from behind the bar.

At eight o'clock, the stewards had begun serving breakfast in the dining car. It was now nearly nine.

Rome was some three hours away.

Lord Darcy was looking over his transcript of the questioning when the Roman Praefect said: "Do you see the odd thing about this group? That they know each other?"

"Well, some of 'em know each other," Master Sean said.

"No, the Praefect is perfectly right," Lord Darcy said without looking up. "They *all* know each other—and well."

"And yet," Cesare Sarto continued, "they seem anxious that we should not know that. They are together for a purpose, and yet they say nothing about that purpose."

"Master Sean," Lord Darcy said, "obviously you did not read that Marseille newspaper I left on your berth last night."

"No, Father. I was tired. Come to think of it, I still am. You refer to the obituary?"

"I do." Lord Darcy looked at Sarto. "Perhaps it was in the Genova papers. The funeral of a certain Nicholas Jourdan is to be held in Napoli on the morrow."

"I heard of it," Praefect Cesare said. "And I got more from the talk of my fellow officers than was in the paper. Captain Nicholas Jourdan, Imperial Navy, Retired, was supposed to have died of food poisoning, but there's evidence that it was a very cleverly arranged suicide. If it *was* suicide, it was probably dropped by the

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Neopolitan officials. We don't like to push that sort of thing if there's no crime involved because there's such a fuss afterwards about the funeral. As you well know."

"Hmm," said Lord Darcy. "I didn't know the suicide angle. Is there evidence that he was depressed?"

"I heard there was, but nobody mentioned any reason for it. Health reasons, perhaps."

"I know of another reason," Lord Darcy said. "Or, at least, a possible reason. About three years ago, Captain Jourdan retired from the navy. It was an early retirement; he was still a young man for a captain. Health reasons were given.

"Actually, he had a choice between forced retirement or a rather nasty court-martial.

"Apparently, he had been having a rather torrid love affair with a young Sicilian woman from Messina, and was keeping her in an apartment in Napoli. Normally, that sort of thing doesn't bother the Navy too much, but this particular young person turned out to be an agent of His Slavonic Majesty, Casimir of Poland."

"Ah-*ha!* Espionage rears its ugly head," the Praefect said.

"Precisely. At the time, Captain Jourdan was commanding H.I.M.S. *Helgoland Bay* and was a very popular commander, both with his officers and his men. Obviously, the Admiralty thought well of him, too, or they shouldn't have put him in command of one of the most important battleships of the line.

"But the discovery that his mistress was a spy cast a different light on things. It turned out that they could not prove he knew she was a spy, nor that he had ever told her any naval secrets. But the suspicion remained. He was given his choice.

"A court-martial would have ruined his career with the navy forever, of course. They'd have found him innocent, then shipped him off to some cold little island off the southern coast of New France and left him there with nothing to do but count penguins. So, naturally, he retired.

"If, as you suggest, it was suicide, it might have been three years of despondency that accounted for it."

Praefect Cesare nodded slowly, a look of satisfaction on his face. "I should have seen it. The way these twelve men deport themselves, the way certain of them show deference to certain others . . . They are some of the officers of the *Helgoland Bay*. And so, obviously, was Peabody."

"I should say so, yes," Lord Darcy agreed.

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"The trouble is," Sarto said, "we still have no motive. What we have to do is get one of them to crack. Both of you know them better than I do; which would you suggest?"

Master Sean said: "I would suggest young Jamieson. Father?"

"I agree, Master Sean. He admitted that he went back to talk to Peabody, but I had the feeling that he didn't want to, that he didn't like Peabody. Perhaps you could put some pressure on him, my dear Praefect."

Blond, pink-faced young Charles Jamieson was called in.

He sat down nervously. It is not easy for a young man to be other than nervous when faced by three older, stern-faced men—a priest, a powerful sorcerer, and an agent of the Roman Praefecture of Police. It is worse when one is involved in a murder case.

Cesare Sarto looked grim, his mouth hard, his eyes cold. The man he had been named for, Caius Iulius, must have looked similar when faced by some badly erring young centurion more than two millenia before.

"Young man, are you aware that impeding the investigation of a major felony by lying to the investigating officer is not only punishable by civilian law, but that I can have you court-martialed by the Imperial Navy, and that you may possibly lose your commission in disgrace?"

Jamieson's pink face turned almost white. His mouth opened, but nothing came out.

"I am aware," the Praefect continued remorselessly, "that one or more of your superiors now in the dining car may have given you orders to do what you have done, but such orders are unlawful, and, in themselves, constitute a court-martial offense."

The young man was still trying to find his voice when kindly old Father Armand broke in. "Now, Praefect, let us not be too hard on the lad. I am sure that he now sees the seriousness of his crime. Why don't you tell us all about it, my son? I'm sure the Praefect will not press charges if you help us now."

Sarto nodded slowly, but his face didn't change, as though he were yielding the point reluctantly.

"Now, my son, let's begin again. Tell us your name and rank, and about what you and your fellow officers did last night."

Jamieson's color had come back. He took a breath. "Charles James Jamieson, Lieutenant, Imperial Navy, British Royal Fleet, at present Third Supply Officer aboard His Imperial Majesty's Ship *Helgoland Bay,* sir! Uh—that is, *Father.*" He had almost saluted.

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"Relax, my son; I am not a naval officer. Go on. Begin with why you and the others are aboard this train and not at your stations."

"Well, sir, the *Hellbay* is in drydock just now, and we were all more or less on leave, you see, but we had to stay around Portsmouth. Then, a week ago, we got the news that our old captain, who retired three years ago, had died and was being buried in Napoli, so we all got together and decided to form a party to go pay our respects. That's all there is to it, really, Father."

"Was Commander John Peabody one of your group?" the Praefect asked sharply.

"No, sir. He retired shortly after our old captain did. Until yesterday, none of us had seen him for three years."

"Your old captain was, I believe, the late Nicholas Jourdan?" Sarto asked.

"Yes, sir."

"*Why did you dislike Commander Peabody*?" the Praefect snapped.

Jamieson's face became suddenly pinker. "No particular reason, sir. I didn't like him, true, but it was just one of those things. Some people rub each other the wrong way."

"You hated him enough to kill him," Praefect Cesare said flatly.

It was as though Jamieson were prepared for that. He didn't turn a hair. "No, sir. I didn't like him, that's true. But I didn't kill him." It was as though he had rehearsed the answer.

"Who did, then?"

"It is my belief, sir, that some unknown person got aboard the train during the ten minutes we were at the Italian border, came in, killed the commander, and left." That answer, too, sounded rehearsed.

"Very well," the Praefect said, "that's all for now. Go to your compartment and stay there until you are called."

Jamieson obeyed.

"Well, what do you think, Father?" Cesare Sarto asked.

"The same as you. He gave us some of the truth, but he's still lying." He thought for a moment. "Let's try a different tactic. We can get—"

He stopped. A man in red-and-blue uniform was coming toward them from the passageway. It was Goodman Fred, the day man.

He stopped at the table. "Excuse me, gentlemen. I have heard about the investigation, of course. The Trainmaster told me to report to you before I went on duty." He looked a little baffled. "I'm not sure what my duties would be, in the circumstances."

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Before Sarto could speak, Lord Darcy said: "What would they normally be?"

"Tend the bar, and make up the beds."

"Well, there will be no need to tend bar as yet, but you may as well make up the beds."

Fred brightened. "Thank you, Father, Praefect." He went back to the passageway.

"You were saying something about trying a different tactic," Praefect Cesare prompted.

"Ah, yes," said his lordship. And explained.

XIX

Maurice Zeisler did not look any the better for the time since he had had his last drink. He looked haggard and old.

Sidney Charpentier was in better shape, but even he looked tired.

The two men sat in the remaining empty chairs at the rear table, facing the three inquisitors.

Master Sean said: "Goodman Sidney Charpentier, I believe you told me you were a licensed Lay Healer. May I see your license, please." It was an order, not a question. It was a Master of the Guild speaking to an apprentice.

There was reluctance, but no hesitation. "Certainly, Master." Charpentier produced the card.

Master Sean looked it over carefully. "I see. Endorsed by My Lord Bishop of Wexford. I know his lordship well. Chaplain Admiral of the Imperial Navy. What is your rank, sir?"

Zeisler's baggy eyes looked suddenly alert, but he said nothing. Charpentier said: "Senior Lieutenant, Master Seamus."

The sorcerer looked at Zeisler. "And yours?"

Zeisler looked at Charpentier with a wry grin. "Not to worry, Sharpie. Young Jamie must've told 'em. Not your fault." Then he looked at Master Sean. "Lieutenant Commander Maurice Edwy Zeisler at your service, Master Seamus."

"And I at yours, Commander. Now, we might as well get all these ranks straight. Let's begin with Sir Stanley."

The list was impressive:

Captain Sir Stanley Galbraith
Commander Gwiliam Hauser
Lt. Commander Martyn Boothroyd
Lt. Commander Gavin Tailleur
Lt. Commander Maurice Zeisler

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Sr. Lieutenant Sidney Charpentier
Sr. Lieutenant Simon Lamar
Sr. Lieutenant Arthur Mac Kay
Sr. Lieutenant Jason Quinte
Lieutenant Lyman Vanepole
Lieutenant Valentine Herrick
Lieutenant Charles Jamieson

"I presume," Lord Darcy said carefully, "that if the *Helgoland Bay* were not in drydock at present, it would have been inconvenient to allow all you gentlemen to leave at one time, eh?"

Zeisler made a noise that was a blend of a cough and a laugh. "Inconvenient, Father? *Impossible*."

"Even so," Lord Darcy continued quietly, "is it not unusual for so many of you to be away from your ship at one time? What occasioned it?"

"Captain Jourdan died," Zeisler said in a cold voice.

"Many men die," Lord Darcy said. "What made *his* death so special?" His voice was as cold as Zeisler's.

Charpentier opened his mouth to say something, but Zeisler cut him off. "Because Captain Nicholas Jourdan was one of the finest naval officers who ever lived."

Praefect Cesare said: "So all of you were going to the Jourdan funeral—including the late Commander Peabody?"

"That's right, Praefect," Charpentier said. "But Peabody wasn't one of the original group. There were sixteen of us going; we wanted the car to ourselves, you see. But the other four couldn't make it; their leaves were suddenly cancelled. That's how Peabody, the good father, here, and the master sorcerer got their berths."

"You had no idea Peabody was coming, then?"

"None. We'd none of us seen him for nearly three years," Charpentier said.

"Almost didn't recognize him," Zeisler put in. "That beard, you know. He'd grown that since we saw him last. But I recognized that sword-stick of his, and that made me look closer at the face. I recognized him. So did Commander Hauser." He chuckled. "Of course, old Hauser would."

"Why he more than anyone else?" the Praefect asked.

"He's head of Ship's Security. He used to be Peabody's immediate superior."

"Let's get back to that sword-stick," Lord Darcy said. "You say

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you recognized it. Did anyone else?"

Zeisler looked at Charpentier. "Did you?"

"I really didn't pay any attention until you pointed it out, Maury. Of course, we all knew he had it. Bought in Lisbon four, five years ago. But I hadn't thought of it, or him, for three years."

"Tell us more about Peabody," Lord Darcy said. "What sort of man was he?"

Charpentier rubbed his big nose with a thick forefinger. "Decent sort. Reliable. Good officer. Wouldn't you say, Maury?"

"Oh, yes," Zeisler agreed. "Good chap to go partying with, too. I remember one time in a little Greek bar in Alexandria, we managed to put away more than a quart of *ouzo* in a couple of hours, and when a couple of Egyptian footpads tried to take us in the street, he mopped up on both of them while I was still trying to get up from their first rush. He could really hold his liquor in those days. I wonder what happened?"

"What do you mean?" Lord Darcy asked.

"Well, he only had a few drinks yesterday, but he was pretty well under the weather last night. Passed out while I was talking to him."

The Roman Praefect jumped on that. "Then you *were* the last to see him?"

Zeisler blinked. "I don't know. I think somebody else went in to see if he was all right. I don't remember who."

Praefect Cesare sighed. "Very well, gentlemen. Thank you. Go to your compartment. I will call for you later."

"Just one more question, if I may," Lord Darcy said mildly. "Commander Zeisler, you said that the late Peabody worked with Ship's Security. He was, I believe, the officer who reported Captain Jourdan's—er—liaison with a certain unsavory young woman from Messina, thereby ruining the captain's career?" It was a shot in the dark, and Darcy knew it, but his intuition told him he was right.

Zeisler's lips firmed. He said nothing.

"Come, come, Commander; we can always check the records, you know."

"Yes," Zeisler said after a moment. "That's true."

"Thank you. That's all for now."

When they had gone, Praefect Cesare slumped down in his seat. "Well. It looks as though Praefect Angelo Ratti will have the honor of making the arrest, after all."

"You despair of solving the case already?" Lord Darcy asked.

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"Oh, not at all. The case is already solved, Reverend Sir. But I cannot make an arrest."

"I'm afraid I don't follow you, my dear Praefect."

A rather sardonic twinkle came into the Italian's eyes. "Ah, then you have not seen the solution to our problem, yet? You do not see how Commander Peabody came to be the *late* Commander Peabody?"

"I'm not the investigating officer here," Lord Darcy pointed out. "You are. What happened, in your view?"

"Well," Cesare said seriously, "what do we have here? We have twelve naval officers going to the funeral of a beloved late Captain. Also, a thirteenth—the man who betrayed that same Captain and brought him to disgrace. A Judas.

"We know they are lying when they tell us that their conversations with him last night were just casual. They could have spoken to him at any time during the day, yet none of them did. They waited until night. Then each of them, one at a time, goes to see him. Why? No reason is given. They claim it was for a casual chat. At that hour of night? After every one of them had been up since early morning? A casual chat! Do you believe that, Reverend Sir?"

Lord Darcy shook his head slowly. "No. We both know better. Every one of them was—and still is—lying."

"Very well, then. What are they lying about? What are they trying to cover up? Murder, of course."

"But, by which one of 'em?" Master Sean asked.

"Don't you see?" The Praefect's voice was low and tense. "Don't you see? It was *all* of them!"

"*What?*" Master Sean stared. "But—"

"Hold, Master Sean," Lord Darcy said. "I think I see where he's going. Pray continue, Praefect Cesare."

"Certainly you see it, Father," the Praefect said. "Those men probably don't consider it murder. It was, to them, an execution after a drumhead court-martial. One of them—we don't know who—talked his way into Peabody's compartment. Then, when the opportunity presented itself, he struck. Peabody was knocked unconscious. Then, one at a time, each of the others went in and struck again. A dozen men, a dozen blows. The deed is done, and no single one of them did it. It was execution by a committee—or rather, by a jury.

"They claim they did not know Peabody was coming along. But does that hold water? Was he on this train, in this car, by coinci-

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dence? That stretches coincidence too far, I think."

"I agree," Lord Darcy said quietly. "It was no coincidence that put him on this train with the others. It was very carefully managed."

"Ah! You see, Master Sean?" Then a frown came over Sarto's face. "It is obvious what happened, but we have no solid proof. They stick to their story too well. We need *proof*—and we have none."

"I don't think you'll get any of them to confess," Lord Darcy said. "Do you, Master Sean?"

"No," said the sorcerer. "Not a chance."

"What we need," Lord Darcy said, "is *physical* proof. And the only place we'll find that is in Compartment Number One."

"We've searched that," Praefect Cesare said.

"Then let us search it again."

XX

Lord Darcy went over the body very carefully this time, his lean, strong fingers probing, feeling. He checked the lining of the jacket, his fingertips squeezing everywhere, searching for lumps or the crackle of paper. Nothing. He took off the wide belt, looking for hidden pockets. Nothing. He checked the boot heels. Nothing.

Finally he pulled off the calf-length boots themselves.

And, with a murmur of satisfaction, he withdrew an object from a flat interior pocket of the right one.

It was a flat, slightly curved silver badge engraved with the double-headed eagle of the Imperium. Set in it was what looked like a dull, translucent, grayish, cabochon-cut piece of glass. But all three men knew that if Peabody's living flesh had touched that gem, it would have glowed like a fire-ruby.

"A King's Messenger," the Praefect said softly.

No one else's touch would make that gem glow. The spell, invented by Master Sorcerer Sir Edward Elmer back in the thirties, had never been solved, and no one knew what sorcerer at present had charge of that secret and made these badges for the King.

This particular badge would never glow again.

"Indeed," Lord Darcy said. "Now we know what Commander Peabody has been doing since he retired from the Navy, and how he managed to retire honorably at such an early age."

"I wonder if his shipmates know," Sarto said.

"Probably not," Lord Darcy said. "King's Messengers don't ad-

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vertise the fact."

"No. But I don't see that identifying him as such gets us any further along."

"We haven't searched the rest of the room thoroughly yet."

Twenty minutes later, Praefect Cesare said: "Nothing. Absolutely nothing. And we've searched everywhere. What are you looking for, anyway?"

"I'm not sure," Lord Darcy admitted, "but I know it exists. Still, it might have ended up on the track with the compartment key. Hmmm." With his keen eyes, he surveyed the room carefully. Then he stopped, looking at the area just above the bed where the body lay. "Of course," he said very softly. "The upper berth."

The upper berth was folded up against the wall and locked firmly in place, making a large compartment that held mattress and bedclothes safely out of the way.

"Get Fred," Lord Darcy said. "He has a key."

Fred, indeed, had a key, and he had been using it. The beds were all made in the other compartments, the lowers changed to sofas and the uppers folded up and locked.

He couldn't understand why the gentlemen wanted that upper berth unlocked, but he didn't argue. He reached up, inserted the key, turned, and lowered the shelf until it was horizontal, all the time doing his best to keep his eyes off the thing that lay in the lower berth.

"Ahh! What have we here?" There was pleasure in Lord Darcy's voice as he picked up the large leather case from where it lay in the upper berth. Then he looked at Fred. "That'll be all for now, Fred; we'll call you when it's time to lock up again."

"Certainly, Father." He went on about his business.

Not until then did his lordship turn the seventeen-by-twelve-by-three leather envelope over. It bore the Royal Emblem, stamped in gold, just beneath the latch.

"*Uh*-oh!" said Master Sean. "More here than we thought." He looked at Lord Darcy. "Did you expect a diplomatic pourch, Father?"

"Not really. An envelope of some kind. King's Messengers usually carry messages, and this one would probably not be verbal. But this is heavy. Must weigh five or six pounds. The latch has been unlocked and not relocked. I'll wager that means *two* keys on the railroad track." He opened it and lifted out a heavy manuscript. He leafed through it.

"What is it?" Cesare Sarto asked.

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"A treaty. In Greek, Latin, and Anglo-French. Between Roumeleia and the Empire." There was a jerkiness in his voice.

Master Sean opened his mouth to say something and then clamped it shut.

Lord Darcy slid the manuscript back into the big leather envelope and clicked the latch shut. "This is not for our eyes, gentlemen. But now we have our evidence. I can tell you exactly how John Peabody died and prove it. You can make your arrest very soon, Praefect."

XXI

There were seventeen men in the observation car of the *Napoli Express* as she rumbled southeast, along the coast of the Tyrrhenian Sea, toward the mouth of the Tiber.

Besides the twelve naval officers, Praefect Cesare, Master Sean, and Lord Darcy, there were also Fred, the day attendant, and Trainmaster Edmund Norton, who had been asked to attend because it was, after all, his train, and therefore his responsibility.

Praefect Cesare Sarto stood near the closed door to the observation deck at the rear of the car, looking at sixteen pairs of eyes, all focused on him. Like an actor taking his stage, the Praefect knew not only the plot, but his lines and blocking.

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Father Armand was at his left, seated at the end of the couch. Fred was behind the bar. The Trainmaster was seated at the passageway end of the bar. Master Sean was standing at the entrance to the passageway. The navy men were all seated. The stage was set.

"Gentlemen," he began, "we have spent many hours trying to discover and sift the facts pertaining to the death of your former shipmate, Commander John Peabody. Oh, yes, Captain Sir Stanley, I know who you all are. You and your fellow officers have consistently lied to me and evaded the truth, thus delaying our solution of this deadly puzzle. But we know, now.

"First, we know that the late commander was an official Messenger for His Imperial Majesty, John of England. Second, we know that he was the man who reported to higher authority what he knew about the late Captain Nicholas Jourdan's inamorata, certain facts which his own investigations, as a Ship's Security officer, had brought out. These facts resulted in Captain Jourdan's forced retirement, and, possibly, in his ultimate demise."

His eyes searched their faces. They were all waiting, and there was an undercurrent of hostility in their expressions.

"Third, we know how John Peabody was killed, and we know by whom it was done. Your cover-up was futile, gentlemen. Shall I tell you what happened last night?"

They waited, looking steadily at him.

"John Peabody was a man with enormous resistance to the effects of alcohol, and yet he passed out last night. Not because of the alcohol, but because someone drugged one of his drinks. Even that he was able to fight off longer than was expected.

"Then, when Peabody was unconscious, a man carefully let himself into Peabody's compartment. He had no intent to kill; he wasn't even armed. He wanted to steal some very important papers which, as a King's Messenger, Peabody was carrying.

"But something went wrong. Peabody came out of his drugged stupor enough to realize what was going on. He made a grab for his silver-headed stick. The intruder got it first.

"Peabody was a strong man and a skillful fighter, even when drunk, as most of you know. In the struggle that ensued, the intruder used that stick as a club, striking Peabody again and again. Drugged and battered, that tough, brave man kept fighting.

"Neither of them yelled or screamed: Peabody because it was not in his nature to call for help; the intruder because he wanted

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no alarm.

"At last, the blows took their final toll. Peabody collapsed, his head smashed in. He was dying.

"The intruder listened. No alarm had been given. He still had time. He found the heavy diplomatic pouch in which those important documents were carried. But what could he do with them? He couldn't stop to read them there, for Tonio, the night man, might be back very soon. Also, he could not carry them away, because the pouch was far too large to conceal on his person, and if Tonio saw it, he would report it when the body was found.

"So he concealed it in the upper berth of Peabody's compartment, thinking to retrieve it later. Then he took Peabody's key, locked the compartment, tossed the key off the train, and went on about his business. He hoped he would have plenty of time, because the body should not have been found until about an hour ago.

"But Peabody, though dying, was not dead yet. Scalp wounds have a tendency to bleed profusely, and in this case, they certainly did. The blood pooled on the floor and ran out under the door.

"Tonio found the blood—and the rest you know.

"No, gentlemen, this was not a vengeance killing as we thought at first. This was done by a man whom we believe to be an agent of, or in the pay of the *Serka*—the Polish Secret Service."

They were no longer looking at Cesare Sarto, they were looking at each other.

Sarto shook his head. "No; wrong again, gentlemen. *Only one mad had the key to that upper berth last night!*" He lifted his eyes and looked at the bar.

"Trainmaster Edmund Norton," he said coldly, "you are under arrest!"

The Trainmaster was already on his feet, and he turned to run up the passageway. If he could get to the door and lock these men in—

But stout little Master Sean O Lochlainn was blocking his way.

Norton was bigger and heavier than the sorcerer, but Norton had only seconds, no time for a fight. From somewhere, he produced a six-inch knife and made an underhand thrust.

Master Sean's right hand made a single complex gesture.

Norton froze, immobile for a long second.

Then, like a large red-and-blue sack of wet oatmeal, he collapsed to the deck. Master Sean took the knife from his nerveless

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fingers as he fell.

"I didn't want him to fall on the knife and hurt himself," he explained, almost apologetically. "He'll come around all right when I take that spell off."

The Navy men were all on their feet, facing Master Sean.

Commander Hauser fingered his streaked beard. "I didn't know a sorcerer could do anything like that," he said in a hushed, almost frightened voice.

"It can't be done at all unless a sorcerer is attacked," Master Sean explained. "All my spell did was turn his own psychic energy back on itself. Gave his nervous system a devil of a shock when the flow was forcibly reversed. It's similar to certain forms of unarmed combat, where the opponent's own force is used against him. If he doesn't attack you, there's not much you can do."

The Roman Praefect walked over to where the Trainmaster lay, took out a pair of handcuffs, and locked Norton's wrists behind his back. "Fred, you had best go get the Assistant Trainmaster; he'll have to take over now. And tell the Master-at-Arms who is waiting at the far end of the passageway to come on in. I want him to take charge of the prisoner now. Captain Sir Stanley, Commander Hauser, do you mind if I borrow Compartment Eight until we get to Rome? Good. Help me get him in there."

The Assistant Trainmaster came back with Fred, and the Praefect explained things to him. He looked rather dazed, but he took charge competently enough.

Behind the bar, Fred still looked shocked. "Here, Fred," the Praefect said, "you need some work to do. Give a drink to anyone who wants one, and have a good stiff one yourself."

"How did you know it wasn't *me* who unlocked that upper berth last night?" Fred whispered.

"For the same reason I knew no one in the other cars on this train did it," Cesare whispered back. "The dining car was locked, and you do not have a key. Tonio did, but he had no key to the berth. Only the Trainmaster has *all* the keys to this train. Now make those drinks."

There were sixteen drinks to serve; Fred went about his work.

Boothroyd smoothed down his white hair. "Just when did the Trainmaster drug Peabody's drink, anyway?"

Master Sean took the question. "Last night, after we left Marseille, when Norton sent Tonio off on an errand. He told Tonio to get some towels, but those towels wouldn't be needed until this

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morning. Tonio would have had plenty of time to get them after we retired. But Peabody was drinking, and Norton wanted to have the chance to drug him. I've seen how easy it is for a barman to slip something into a drink unnoticed." He did not look at Zeisler.

Sir Stanley cleared his throat. "You said we were all lying, Praefect, that our cover-up was futile. What did you mean by that?"

Lord Darcy had already told Sarto to take credit for everything because "it would be unseemly for a man of the cloth to be involved in such things." So Cesare Sarto wisely did not mention *whose* deductions he was expounding.

"You know perfectly well what I mean, Captain. You and your men did *not* go into Peabody's compartment, one at a time, for a 'friendly chat.' You each had something specific to say to the man who turned in Captain Jourdan. Want to tell me what it was?"

"Might as well, eh? Very well. We were pretty certain he'd been avoiding us because he thought we hated him. We didn't. Not his fault, you see. He did his duty when he reported what he knew about that Sicilian woman. Any one of us would have done the same. Right, Commander?"

"Damn right," said Commander Hauser. "Would've done it myself. Some of us older officers told the captain she was no good for him from the start, but he wouldn't listen. If he was brokenhearted, it was mostly because she'd made a proper fool of him, and no mistake."

Captain Sir Stanley took up the story again. "So that's what we went in there for, one at a time. To tell him we didn't hold it against him. Even Lieutenant Jamieson, eh, my boy?"

"Aye, sir. I didn't like him, but it wasn't for that reason."

The Praefect nodded. "I believe you. But that's where the cover-up came in. *Each and every one of you was afraid that one of your group had killed Peabody!*"

There was silence. The silence of tacit assent.

"I watched you, listened to you," the Praefect went on. "Each of you considered the other eleven one by one, and came up with a verdict of 'innocent' every time. But that doubt remained. And you were afraid that I would find a motive in what Peabody did three years ago. So you told me nothing. I must confess that, because of that evasion, that lying, I was suspicious at one time of all of you."

"By S'n George! Then what made you begin to suspect that Nor-

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ton was guilty, sir?" asked Lieutenant Valentine Herrick.

"When it was reported to me that the Trainmaster showed up within half a minute after he had been sent for, right after Tonio found the blood. Norton had been awake since three o'clock yesterday morning: what was he still doing up, in full uniform at nearly one o'clock this morning? Why hadn't he turned things over to the Assistant Trainmaster, as usual, and gone to sleep long before? That's when I began to wonder."

Lieutenant Lyman Vandepole ran a finger over his hairline mustache. "But until you found that pouch, you couldn't be sure, could you, sir?"

"Not certain, no. But if one of you had gone in there with deliberate murder on his mind, he'd most likely have brought his own weapon. Or, if he intended to use that sword-stick, he would have used the blade, since every one of you knew it was a sword-stick. But Norton didn't, you see."

Senior Lieutenant Simon Lamar looked at "Father Armand." "With all that fighting going on next door, I've surprised it didn't wake you up, Reverend Sir."

"I'm sure it would have," Lord Darcy said. "That is how we were able to pinpoint *when* it happened. Tonio left the car to go forward about midnight. At that time, Master Seamus and I were out on the rear platform. I was having a smoke, and he was keeping me company. We went back to our compartment at twenty after twelve. Norton didn't know we were out there, of course, but the killing must have taken place during that twenty minutes. Which means that the murder took place *before* we reached the Italian border, and Norton will have to be extradited to Provence."

Fred began serving the drinks he had mixed, but before anyone could taste his, Captain Sir Stanley Galbraith said: "A moment, gentlemen, if you please. I would like to propose a toast. Remember, we will have another funeral to attend after the one in Napoli."

When Fred had finished serving, he stood respectfully to one side, his own drink in his hand. The others rose.

"Gentlemen," said the Captain, "I give you Commander John Wycliffe Peabody, who did his duty as he saw it and died honorably in the service of his King."

They drank in silence.

§ § §

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XXII

By twenty minutes after one that afternoon, the *Napoli Express* was twelve miles out of Rome, moving on the last leg of her journey to Napoli.

Lord Darcy and Master Sean were in their compartment, quietly relaxing after an excellent lunch.

"Me lord," said the sorcerer, "are you sure it was right to turn those copies of the treaty over to the Praefecture of Police for delivery to Imperial Naval Intelligence?"

"It was perfectly safe."

"Well, what's the use of our carrying our copies all the way to Athens, then?"

"My dear Sean, the stuff Peabody was carrying was a sham. I looked it over carefully. One of the provisions, for instance, is that a joint Anglo-French-Greek naval base shall be established at 29° 51′ North, 12° 10′ East."

"What's wrong with that, me lord?"

"Nothing, except that it is in the middle of the Sahara Desert."

"Oh."

"Kyril's signature was a forgery. It was signed in Latin characters, and the Basileus reads and writes only Greek. The Greek and Latin texts do not agree with each other, nor with the Anglo-French. In one place in the Greek text, the city of Constantinople is referred to as the capital of England, while Paris is given as the capital of Greece. I could go on. The whole thing is a farrago of nonsense."

"But—*why*?"

"One can only conjecture, of course. I believe he was a decoy. Think about it. Sixteen men all about to go to a funeral, and, at the last minute, four of them have their leaves canceled. Why? I feel the Royal touch of His Majesty's hand in there. I think it was to make certain Peabody got aboard that train with his fellow officers. It would look like a cover, as though he, too, were going to Jourdan's funeral.

"I think what happened was this: His Majesty found that the *Serka* had somehow gotten wind of our naval treaty with Roumeleia. But they didn't know it was being signed by Prince Richard as proxy in Rouen, so they started tracing it in London. So His Majesty had this utterly nonsensical pseudo-treaty drawn up and sent in with Peabody. He was a decoy."

"Did Peabody know that?" Master Sean asked.

"Highly unlikely. If a man knows he is a decoy, he tends to *act*

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like a decoy, which ruins the illusion. No, he didn't know. Would he have fought to the death to preserve a phony document? Of course, being an honorable officer, once that pouch was locked, he would not have opened it, so he did not know its contents."

"But, me lord! If he was supposed to be a decoy, if he was supposed to lead *Serka* agents off on a wild goose chase somewhere else while you and I got the real thing safely to Athens—*why was the decoy dumped practically in our laps*?"

"I think," said his lordship with care, "that we missed connections somewhere. Other transportation may have—*must* have—been provided for us. But something must have gone awry.

"Nonetheless, my dear Sean, all will work out for the best. A murder aboard the *Napoli Express* will certainly hit the news services, but the story will be so confused that *Serka* won't be able to figure out what happened until too late."

"It would have been even worse confused if Cesare had come out with his conspiracy theory," the magician said. "He's a good man at his job, but he don't know people."

"His problem," Lord Darcy said, "is that he happens to be a master at paper work. On paper, he can spot a conspiracy two leagues away. But sentences on paper do not convey the nuances of thought that spoken words do. A conspiracy is easy to concoct if it involves only paper work, and it takes an expert to find it. But you, as a sorcerer, and I, as a criminal investigator, know that a group of human beings simply can't hold a conspiracy together that long."

"Aye, me lord," the stout little Irishman agree. "I'm glad you stopped me. I almost told Cesare to his face that his theory was all foolishness. Why, that bunch would have given it away before they finished the job. Can you imagine Zeisler tryin' to keep his mouth shut about somethin' like that? Or young Jamieson not breaking down?"

Lord Darcy shook his head. "The whole group couldn't even hide the fact that they were doing something perfectly innocent like assuring an old comrade that they did not think ill of him. Even more ridiculous than that is the notion that any such group would pick a train to commit their murder on, a place where, to all intents and purposes, they would be trapped for hours. Those men are not stupid; they're trained naval officers. They'd either have killed Peabody in Paris or waited until they got to Napoli. They still couldn't have held their conspiracy together, but they would have thought they had a better chance."

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"Still and all," Master Sean said staunchly, "Cesare Sarto is a good investigator."

"I must agree with you there," said Lord Darcy. "He has the knack of finding answers even when you don't want him to."

"How do you mean, me lord?"

"As he and Praefect Angelo were taking Norton away, he offered his hand and thanked me. I said the usual things. I said I hoped I'd see him again. He shook his head. 'I am afraid,' he said, 'that I shall never see Father Armand Brun again. But I hope to meet Lord Darcy some day.' "

Master Sean nodded silently.

The train moved on toward Napoli.

WIDE OPEN SPACES

(for John Wayne)

There are
13 billion
light years
between me
and the edge
of the universe.

And that's
the way I like
it, pardner.

—Peter Payack

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LETTERS

Dear Mr. Scithers

I've just finished reading your latest edition of *IA'sf* (vol. 2, no. 4). It was the first time I saw this magazine on the bookshelves in our local bookstore and I, regretfully, missed your first editions. Unfortunately your magazine is not more widely distributed throughout South Africa and only the main centres supply it. Can you believe it?! I saw *IA'sf* only by chance, tucked away in one corner of the shelves and naturally bought it. Is it possible for us in South Africa to subscribe to ensure receiving all future editions?

I'm also interested in writing stories for *IA'sf* and enclose a few International Coupons with my letter to cover postal fees since the U.S. Post Office won't accept a stamped envelope from any other country yet. (Still, they might do so in the near future.) Please send me a copy of your guidelines and description for your story needs of manuscripts for writers.

Yours sincerely,

Kay Gee
Pretoria, South Africa

Glad to hear that we make our appearance in the far corners of the English-speaking world.

—Isaac Asimov

Dear Mr. Scithers,

As fans have discovered, some of our favorite authors have a portrait problem. Lin Carter looks like a professor of Boolean algebra, while poor Frank Herbert is a dead ringer for Boss Tweed. Harlan Ellison has the strangest of physiognomy quirks. He looks 20 years old from the front view and 60 from the side. I recommend the three-quarter shot. Fortunately, Ike (excuse me Dr.) Asimov's rugged good looks make him photogenic from any angle. If you could persuade him to donate those salt-and-pepper sport jackets to the Salvation Army he'll make a fine potential best-dressed-man candidate.

Candidly,

Sid Brosard

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Never mind! My peculiar taste in clothes is part of me and I won't change.

—Isaac Asimov

Dear Dr. Asimov:

I would like to praise the cover art of the Sept/Oct issue, also the story that goes with it, "Softly Touch the Stranger's Mind," by E. Amalia Andujar. It was as beautiful as the illustation was. I would also like to praise the story, "Seasoning," by Hal Clement and hope to see more stories of this series in the near future.

All of the rest of the stories were of their usual good quality; and wonder of wonders, I finally solved Martin Gardner's puzzle without having to look in the back to find the answer. All in all this was a very good issue, and I hope that they continue to be this good.

Your devoted fan,

Patrick Gilliland
Hubbard OH

It gives us pleasure to be on the receiving end of pleasure.

—Isaac Asimov

Dear Dr. Asimov:

I must say I really enjoyed your editorial in the November-December issue of the magazine. I must heartily say I agree with you concerning the movie *Close Encounters of the Third Kind.* I was really disappointed by the movie as a whole, not only because of the lack of real science in it, but because there was no character that I could get close to.

Conversely, in *Star Wars* I was able to leave my sophistication at the door and even identify with a few of the characters. The little girl in me took over and I enjoyed every moment of the movie. It was Ben who I felt most compelled to from the moment I saw him in the picture. I think we would all like to meet someone with the magic and fascination of a Ben Kenobi, Jedi Knight and keeper of the Force.

Whereas I had difficulty sitting through *Close Encounters,* I was able to sit through *Star Wars* five times leaving my sophistication at the door every time and having five fun rides. I would like to see it again; however, being somewhat forgetful, I'm afraid one of

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these I'll forget to bring my sophistication home with me. Then where would I be!

Please continue your good work with the magazine, and please continue with those book reviews. I don't always agree with what they say, but I contend they have every right to let us know what they think; just as you with your letter column allow us readers to say what we feel.

Sincerely,

Julie A. Sanders
Worcester, MA

My editorial on Close Encounters seems to have received more ayes than noes, but I am still nervous about functioning as critic.
—Isaac Asimov

Greetings!

I bought the first issue of this magazine because the Good Doctor's name was on it—a trust I've developed over a decade of reading his excellent fiction and fact. (By the way, sir, I read your story "Found!" in the first issue of the fascinating magazine called *Omni* . . . I hope they never find us!) I have almost every issue so far (they disappear off the rack at an alarming rate sometimes) and finally decided to put in my two cents' worth with the November-December issue.

First and foremost: Congratulations on your very much deserved Hugo, Mr. Scithers! It's nice to know the rest of the SF world agrees with us.

Now, about that editorial, dear Doctor—never has a movie deserved that more. Much as the artist in me loved the special effects in CE3K and appreciated their difficulty, I do require a story, a plot that will *explain,* not further confuse these effects. And it could have been *so* good . . . sigh.

Mark Grenier gets triple A's on the subject of limericks! The pun stories only rated sixes to sevens for me on Jim Pierce's 'Standard Groan Units' scale. Now come on, people . . .

"The Tryouts" was okay. One question; the body of the story was sort of grey and serious—why did Mr. Longyear put such a flippant ending on it? It rudely obliterated the overall mood of an otherwise good story. Loved the George Barr article; I live and paint in awe of most SF artists. "On the Q167 File" was good, as

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was "Errata Slip Nubmer Two," "Malice in Wonderland," and "Out of Quarantine," the latter being the thought-prodder. "By the Hours in a Day" was good but very nearly predictable. "The Man With the Eye" is in this 'good' catagory only because gambling doesn't interest me at all.

"As Chemist to Chemist" I loved. "The Last Master of Limericks" entertained me and then left me thoughtful—the kind of story that made me love science fiction in the first place. "Farside Station" was well thought out and written, using my favorite theme; man will win in spite of himself. "One More Time" would have made a great "Twilight Zone" episode.

"The First Star" by J. P. Boyd was by far my favorite. It was the one that brought tears to my eyes. I can give it my highest complement; I would like to write like *that.* I'll be watching for more of his stories.

Thank you very much for taking out the cigarette ads, I think I'm allergic to them as well.

Terri Anne Crabb
Box 773
Superior, MT 59872

Lest anyone think I am playing both sides of the street, my story in the first issue of Omni *appeared only after consultation with Joel and George.*

—Isaac Asimov

Dear Mr. Scithers,

Congratulations on your well deserved Hugo! Congratulations are also due on your November issue, another fine one.

The November cover was just superb! Barr is at his best in his color work and the November cover is one of his best paintings. Covers by Barr or Freas are always welcome. How about having Krenkel do one of his exciting covers for you?

The interior art was well done for the most part, although the work by Freff and Lakey was only mediocre. It's always nice to see something by Kirk. He's certainly one of the best.

Of the stories, I rate "The Enumerators," "The Last Master of Limericks," "Malice in Wonderland," "By the Hours in a Day," "A Growing Concern," and "Farside Station" as good. "The Tryouts," "The First Star," and "On the Q167 File" get poor ratings. The

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rest all deserve a fair.

Best wishes,

Gary Helfrich
Auburn IN

I'm glad you liked the November cover. Some people didn't. It is impossible to please everybody and one must be philosophical about it.

—Isaac Asimov

Dear George:

The Nov/Dec issue seems to have been your best yet. "Seasoning" was excellent. "Softly Touch the Stranger's Mind" was superb beyond belief. "The Victor Hours" was absolutely great. "The Bitter End" was supremely enjoyable. "An Eye for Detail" was delicious. "Thirty Love" and "Bat Durston, Space Marshal" were merely good. "Inevitability Sphere" was great. "The Adventure of the Global Traveler," however, wasn't all that great. "On Theories and Experiments" and "On Man's Rôle in the Galaxy" were again merely good.

All this excellence poses a problem, though. If you go monthly, will you be able to keep up this level of quality? Especially now, since you're starting *A'sfAm*? I would rather see you maintain the same high level of quality than see a lower-quality magazine more frequently.

Well, I fear I must be going. I have a submission for your magazine to re-draft. Here's hoping I can turn out something as good as what appeared in your September-October issue.

Your would-be contributor,

John Hall

P.S.: As to the matter of what to call the type of SF Dr. A, Arthur Clark, Hal Clement, and co. write, how about "traditional SF"? This does seem to be a fairly accurate term. A very accurate term.

We don't want to sacrifice quality for quantity either. We'll shoot for both. —And how about classical science fiction?

—Isaac Asimov

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Dear Mr. Scithers and Dr. Asimov,

I've been hearing quite a bit lately about how hard it is to get quality fiction, and now that you're going monthly the situation is likely to get much worse. I have a suggestion.

In the November-December *IA'sfm* there were too many stories. I'm not necessarily saying that there was too much fiction, but that it was divided into too many small units. Fifteen stories is just too many. Even though they were all at least readable, most good, and a few even great ("Farside Station") they all begin to run together towards the end. I would prefer fewer, longer stories. I'd also like to see serials, despite what Dr. Asimov has said about them.

But my real suggestion is that I would like to see more features and art. There are innumerable places to get stories, but good art and non-fiction for the SF reader are getting rather hard to find. Things I'd like to see include: film reviews, longer editorials by Dr. Asimov as well as a second editorial by Mr. Scithers, an art review column, a science-editorial column like the one Dr. Asimov does in *F&SF* and Dr. Pournelle does in *Galaxy* and *Destinies,* color interior art (you don't need expensive paper to print color—look at *Reader's Digest,* but perhaps a center section of high-quality paper like John Campbell used to do in *Astounding* would be possible), a longer letter column, etc. The above suggestions, I believe, could improve IA'sfm from the best SF magazine to the best possible!

As for what you have now, I like Ginger Kaderabek's artist column—in fact it is usually the first thing I read, the editorial comes second, then "On Books" and "Letters." The cover art was the best and I hope to see a lot more of George Barr's work. The incredible detail that guy can get combined with the brilliant color make him one of my favorite artists. I would, however, like to see one of the Astronautical artists illustrate one of the Medea stories.

Jack Williamson's "Farside Station," J. P. Boyd's "The First Star," Barry B. Longyear's "The Tryouts," and Garry R. Osgood's "The Last Master of Limericks," were, in that order, the best stories this time. All were really great. The rest of the stories were all good but nothing outstanding like the above.

Until next time,

Sincerely,

Donald Robertson
Sacramento CA

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If we could have more non-fiction and art, without cutting down the fiction, we would do it like a shot. Tell you what, make the magazine so successful that we can go large-size, slick, and thick, and we'll have more of everything.
—Isaac Asimov

Dear Dr. Asimov,

I have been a fan of yours and science fiction for many years (not to cast any aspersions on your age or mine). I have found myself being constantly astounded by the ideas you present in your stories. When I received the first issue of *IA'sfm* I was pleased to discover the same caliber of writing (most of the time) in it. Even my husband compliments your magazine every time he reads a new issue, and he is not a staunch fan like me.

What prompts me to write this letter though is a story in the November/December issue, "Malice in Wonderland" by Glen M. Bever. It is very rare to find humor in science fiction done so well (you and a few others are the exception). My congratulations to your staff for giving new authors a chance, because even Dr. Asimov was once an unknown author. I will continue to look forward to new and exciting ideas presented to me in your magazine.

I also like the artistic representations in the magazine, but I do not understand why the women are scantily dressed in most of the drawings. I am not a prude or a women's libber, but I am tired of advertising people depicting scantily clad women on the cover of magazines just for the sake of sales. I guess science fiction publishers are the same as all the rest. They are out to get as much money as possible any way they can. The picture on the cover of the November/December issue couldn't be the woman in the story it is supposed to pertain to because all the people wore yellow thermal suits and these suits would not be transparent. They would not protect the people from the ultraviolet rays mentioned many times in the story. Please ask your artists to be more realistic in their presentations of characters in the stories, although I know that is asking much in this day and age.

Thank you again for your wonderful magazine, and Dr. Asimov, when are you going to write another book?

Sincerely,

Cynthia Laspisa
7185 S. Stoney Creek Rd.
Monroe, Michigan 48161

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I would like to be on the side of the angels, but truth above all! I enjoy scantily-dressed young women. Something about hormones, I guess.

—Isaac Asimov

Dear Mr. Scithers and Dr. Asimov,

Since Dr. Asimov does not like the term "hard-core" appended to "science-fiction fan," it would probably be better to call myself "incurable" instead.

I stumbled (literally) across the September-October issue of your magazine in a local supermarket. At first, it seemed my eyes were deceiving me. While there are numerous science-fact articles around with Dr. Asimov's by-line, fiction with his by-line is scarce these days. To find an entire magazine with that name on it—even though the stories contained therein may not be written by him—seems to be a minor miracle. As a result, I purchased the copy of the mag which was on the floor, and also (by a stroke of luck) found the November-December edition also on the shelves. That, too, was purchased. My only regret is that I didn't get the first editions. However, I shouldn't be disappointed in the future. Under separate cover, my subscription is being ordered at the address given for that business.

This letter, however, is to state to you that I have been extremely pleased with the two issues purchased. Over the years I have purchased a large amount of science-fiction magazines and books (both hardbound and paperback). To date, absolutely nothing has been thrown away—no matter how badly written nor how poorly presented in format. Indiscriminate? Yes; I admit to being one of the type. The fact is, I came from a small midwestern town where only the village idiot would read such "trash."

Due to length and lack of "content," I don't expect this letter to appear in the magazine. However, I just wanted to tell you both that I, for one, appreciate your efforts, have enjoyed practically all the stories, and have placed the magazines on the shelf marked "read again . . . and again."

Ed Brady
472 West 4800 South
Ogden UT 84403

P.S. Please forgive the typos. It's all a holdover from my days as a

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rather poor newswriter, and my current career in the publishing field.

Well, Joel said my name would help circulation. Letters like this just help maintain his illusion. Now when things go wrong, he'll blame it on me and have me horse-whipped.

—Isaac Asimov

Dear Dr. Asimov:

Let's hear it for the power of the people! The letters that I and others wrote about the cigarette ads and the mailing covers obviously were not in vain. Thanks for listening to your readers.

Your November-December issue was, as is becoming usual, excellent. The stories were all good, although some were weak. "One More Time" is simply a rehash of a theme done to death long ago, while "By the Hours in a Day" simply had a far-too-obvious twist. These minor flaws are amply recompensated by gems such as "The First Star," "As Chemist to Chemist," and "The Man with the Eye." The latter, although using a common theme, refreshes it in such a manner as to make the entire field of psychic powers seem readable once more. I applaud your extensive use of short-short stories, whether in the horrible pun category or not. Forty and fifty page tales are good in their own way, but one per issue is certainly ample. The short-shorts, suitable for reading in quick bites, deserve printing as well. Of course, you should not neglect longer stories. Tales such as "The Last Master of Limericks" need to be printed whatever the length. Although starting as a typical space-war yarn, this metamorposized into a really remarkable story, one of the best printed in your magazine so far.

Incidentally, the limericks are one of the best parts in the whole thing. Keep 'em coming!

Sincerely,

Stephen Fleming
Atlanta GA

Foolishly, I told George I was a limerick expert. I have to ride herd on all of them now and adjust the syllable count.

—Isaac Asimov

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Dear Dr. Asimov:

The year was 1930, and I was 13. In Denver that year on a druggist's magazine stand, I chanced to spy the colorful cover of Hugo Gernsback's *Amazing Stories*. I was hooked.

As a 48-year reader of science fiction, I now feel impelled to stand my first letter to a magazine, in order to congratulate you and Mr. Scithers on an excellent job of science fiction magazine production. On finishing the November-December issue, I realized with some awe that in all those years it was the first time I could say of an issue that I enjoyed every word on every page. Thank you.

Sincerely,

John G. Glascock, D.D.S.
Covina CA

We are very happy that what impelled you to write a first-time letter after nearly fifty years was pleasure and not, let us say, indignation.

—Isaac Asimov

Der Mr. Scithers,

Pursuant to my policy of commenting on every issue of IASFM (beginning last issue), here I am again. George Barr's cover was beautiful: and the best part was that he managed to make it look like a cover straight out of the golden age, and yet still be true to the story. Of course the craftmanship was far better than much of what we got in the golden age!

I thoroughly enjoyed Dr. A's editorial .... I would have enjoyed it a lot more if I'd seen the movie.

"Malice in Wonderland" was easily my favorite piece in the book. It reminded me of some stories in Analog some years ago about a character named Kelvin Throop. They were not all written by the same person, but they all possessed the same acid wit and bizarre setting (or letter subject) which Glen Bever produced in "Malice." Is it possible that Al Gingerich could be revived (as Kelvin Throop was) in a new job? As an afterthought, I don't suppose he is the same Gingerich who recently published a paper on the evolution of the primates?

"The Tryouts" was well-written, and I think Mr. Longyear has managed to introduce us to an alien culture in the very best

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new-wave (non-expository) style. We need more of this subtle touch, particularly when so deftly combined with humor, as in this case. A perfect example of what I mean is Leiber's "Coming Attractions." That's the way to tell everything you need to about a culture without seeming to, and that's what Longyear approached in "The Tryouts"! Good work!

"The Enumerators" was a bad pun. I habitually tell very bad puns, and am justly scorned for it, but I rarely draw them out as long as this one was. It would have been much funnier if kept to less than a page.

"External Revenue" was even worse; I like limericks, but not this one!

Ginger Kaderabek's piece on George Barr was interesting. I don't know if I mentioned this in my last letter or not, but I definitely like the idea of telling us about the artists.

"The First Star" was readable but unexciting. I was disappointed, because so much more could have been done with the idea.

"Early Morning Pick-me-up" was a limerick I *did* like (see!). "The Last Master of Limericks" was excellent, but what *was* that last line?!?

"Errata Slip Nubmer Two" was hilarious; I can't wait for Mumber Three!

"By the Hours in a Day" was shocking and depressing; it filled me with a profound sense of lost happiness and wasted years. That is to say it achieved its goal. Unfortunately, I am currently faced with the "can two people live together and both have full careers" dilemma, and the story carried unpleasant echoes of recent emotions. I wonder how many people would do what the two estranged lovers in the story did if they could?

I am presently taking an SF course, and the class discussions of the books we have been reading have given me more insight into the other SF which I read for pleasure. It is a very valuable experience for me, and with a good teacher, I think almost anyone would equally benefit from such a course.

I was also glad to hear that you will now be monthly. Nov./Dec. was a good issue, though not quite as good as the last one in my opinion. If you're interested, my roommate rates *Iasfm* 2nd (after *F&SF*), and before *Analog* and *Galaxy*. This does you little good however, since he reads my copies.

David C. Merkel
Lawrence KS

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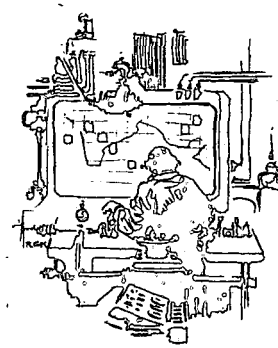
Sharing copies is useful, since it serves to introduce the magazine. Once the introduction is completed, wean the man and let him buy his own.

—Isaac Asimov

Yes, we do want to see stories from newcomers as well as from old hands at the writing game. Since there are many things about manuscript format that are not at all obvious, and which you simply won't get right if you guess at them, we will send you a sheet on manuscript preparation—as well as a sheet on our current story needs—if you will send us (here at Box 13116, Philadelphia PA 19101) an envelope, addressed to yourself, about 9½ inches long (what the stationery stores call a number 10 envelope) with postage for a one-ounce first-class letter. If you are in a foreign country and can't get U.S. stamps, either send us an International Postal Reply Coupon or else send us a few colorful postage stamps from your country—some of our friends collect stamps like that.

Please remember that the address for changes of address or delivery problems for your subscription is not the Philadelphia address—which is for manuscripts, letters to the editor, and requests for manuscript information. Subscription matters go to Box 1855 GPO, New York NY 10001.

—George H. Scithers



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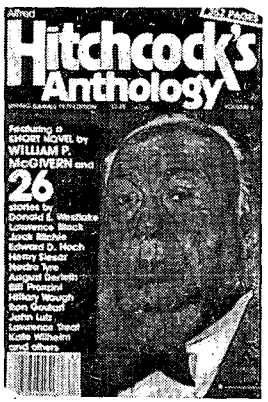

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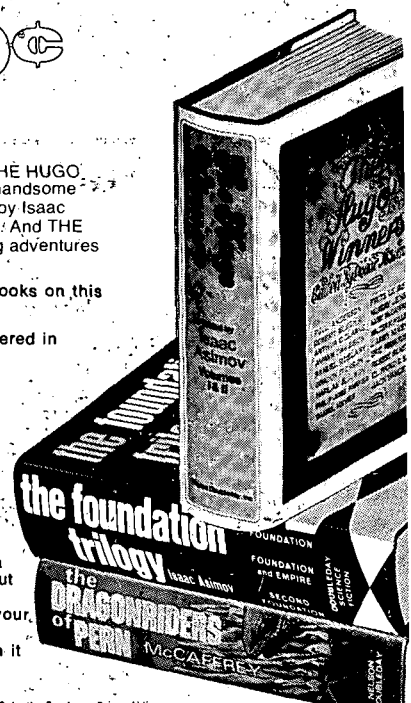

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